

Investigation of the Performance Evaluation System of Higher Education Teachers in China During the Period of “Double First-Class”

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Abstract: As education reform is spreading across the globe, educational performance management plays an essential role in developing a high-quality faculty of the university around the world. With the implementation of “Double First-class” construction, the problems related to the cultivation of college teachers have attracted public attention. This paper aims to explore the characters, influence, and existing problems of the current evaluation system in this special period. First of all, the study reviews the appearance and influence of education evaluation and performativity of Western countries. The study then summarizes the development and characteristics of faculty evaluation in China during the past 50 years. Following that, the main problems of current evaluation have been outlined through the status quo of teachers' performativity in Chinese Higher institutions. Finally, based on the discussion of the current situation, a series of suggestions have been presented, which may be helpful with the implementation of “Double First-class” and improving the validity of Chinese college teachers' performance evaluation system.

Keywords: China; Performance Evaluation; Higher Education; Double First-Class

Introduction

The first appearance of “Performativity” was in the public and business sectors. In the context of contemporary requirements regarding efficient production, lots of scholars focus on this topic, such as Collins ^[1] puts up with the concept of getting the right people on the bus. Workers' quality, as one of the variables of deciding the outputs, could be improved through a technology of managerialism that constructs those outcomes as quantifiable ^[2] ^[3]. According to previous research, performativity is a technology, a culture, and a mode of regulation that employs judgments, comparisons, and displays as means of incentive, control, and attrition. In general, performativity in education can be regarded as the result of industrialization. Education reform is springing into action during the 30 years, the key elements of the education reform ‘package’ are embedded in three interrelated policy technologies: the market, managerialism, and performativity ^[2]. Under the influence of the marketization of higher education, performance evaluation has changed to institutionalization and has become a means for society to evaluate the efficiency of colleges and universities. Colleges and universities use performativity to evaluate teachers. With increasingly self-governing business-as-provider in a competitive marketplace, more and more headteachers and principles make emphasis performativity and outcomes ^[2], which may lead to a new kind of teacher- excellence, and improvement is the driving force of those teachers who can max-mize performativity.

There are three features of World-class schools-sufficient sources, supportive management, and top-level teachers. To enhance the comprehensive strength and international competitiveness of China's Higher Education, the Chinese government has decided on the construction of “Double First-class”, which aims to build First-class universities and disciplines of the

world and becomes a major theme of China's higher education development and reform for a long time. The important part of reforming higher education institutions is to establish a high level of teaching staff, and the cultivation of teachers requires a scientific and reasonable evaluation system [4]. Thus, it is necessary to sort out and analyze the performance system of teachers in China and propose corresponding solutions to the existing problems, to accelerate the pace of the construction of "Double First-class". Therefore, this study will be discussed into five sections to answer these questions: What are the characteristics and problems of the teachers' evaluation system in China's higher education? How to mitigate this situation?

1. Previous research on the performance evaluation system of teachers in higher education

With the influence of the financial crisis in the 1970s, western countries introduced performance evaluation into the higher education sector to improve the university's outputs and reduce education resources. In 1979, Tennessee carried out higher education performance evaluation and determined the amount of University Grants according to the performance evaluation results [5]. Besides, the UK has successively implemented four rounds of scientific research level assessment (RAE) and finished a new scientific research excellence framework (REF) assessment after. Previous research on teachers' evaluation focuses on three themes which will be discussed in the following parts [6].

2. Standards and contents of the evaluation system

Although some scholars argued that teachers' evaluation criteria should include responsibility, classroom design ability and the manufacture of classroom atmosphere, teaching skills, the reasonable evaluation of students' performance, communication ability, and proactive spirit, there are four aspects- professional ethics, theoretical knowledge, teaching ability, and the communication skills which can be summarized from previous studies.

Most of the previous research is focused on the outputs from teachers. However, teacher performance evaluation indicators are not only set to achieve the objectives of colleges and universities but also conducive to the personal career development of teachers [7]. To achieve the goal of "Double First-class", many researchers focus on the planners and extra contents of the evaluation system. Based on two rounds of the questionnaire survey, Tian, Li, and Quan [8] use the AHP analysis method to discuss how to formulate a scientific, reasonable, and effective performance index system for college teachers. Wang [7] pointed out that schools, departments, and teachers should participate together in the formulation of scientific, reasonable, and effective evaluation indicators, considering the factors such as teachers' job satisfaction. In addition, since working environment, housing, and salary are the most concerned factors of higher education teachers [9][10], some scholars believed that under the background of "Double First-class" construction, colleges need to verify the salary standard according to the post, strengthen the basis function of performance results, and establish a reward performance system.

3. Purpose of teacher performance evaluation

According to the previous empirical studies, researchers gave different interpretations of the purposes of university Teachers' performance evaluation, which can be divided into two means in general-teacher management and teacher improvement [11][12][13].

Stiggins [14] argued that the management of teachers is reflected when the evaluation results become the basis for teachers' salary, reward, punishment, and promotion, the evaluation could control, motivate teachers, and realize educational accountability. Additionally, when the evaluation results become the information source of feedback on teachers' strengths and weaknesses and the basis for the formulation of subsequent corrective training plans, the evaluation system could supervise teachers' teaching quality [14].

Furthermore, the two types of higher schoolteachers' performance evaluation purposes will alternate or integrate over time [13]. For example, in the 1980s, the performance evaluation of university teachers in the United Kingdom was aimed at managing teachers, and then gradually moved towards the purpose of developing teachers [9]. Similarly, NewSimilarlys gradually shifted from being oriented towards teacher development to a combination of both [15].

In summary, the researchers discussed the purpose of the evaluation based on the two ways of using the evaluation results. On the one hand, the performance evaluation of college teachers is a symbol of the introduction of private enterprise performance management models in colleges and universities and equating the evaluation results with their income can help schools manage teachers based on performance, improve the level of teachers, and ensure the quality of school education and teaching. On the other hand, the feedback mechanism based on the evaluation results and the provision of post-training is designed to promote the professional growth and development of teachers themselves. However, whether the purpose of developing teachers can achieve in practice should be examined the impact teachers in a scientific way^[15].

4. Methods of performance evaluation

Based on the concepts of teachers' performance evaluation, Shinkfield^[16] proposed various methods such as classroom observation, student academic achievement, teaching video evaluation, file recording, and interview evaluation are all very effective performance evaluation methods. Although those methods reflect the scientificity and rationality of the evaluation, and the evaluation indicators are continuously refined, it is difficult to implement a complex and large number of quantitative indicator systems^[17]. To mobilize the enthusiasm of college teachers to improve work performance and teaching outputs, scholars put up with using informatization methods to evaluate more scientifically. Lu and Chen^[18] proposed the use of the Analytic Hierarchy Process, a 360-degree Omni-directional method, and a balanced scorecard to design a complete and reasonable performance evaluation index system for college teachers, which is helpful to the organic unity and realization of the strategic goals of colleges and universities and the goals of teacher professional development^[19]. In addition, Chen^[20] used the path analysis method to conduct hypothetical exploration and research on the constructed two-factor intermediary analysis model and found that factors such as the fairness of the organization, the number amount of university teachers' salaries, and the satisfaction of the work environment existed on the results of job performance, which expands the application of fairness theory in the field of job performance.

Generally speaking, foreign scholars' research is based on large-scale and rigorous empirical investigations, which make them convinced and contribute to both theoretical and empirical research on teacher performance evaluation. Although numbers of scholars in China focus on the impact and relationship with national policy, few scholars in China adopted empirical research methods. Consequently, further research should need more scientific and diverse methods on this topic.

5. The performance evaluation system of higher education teachers in China

The "Reform and Opening-up" had restored the various systems of colleges and universities, which strengthened the power of universities to manage themselves and led to the diverse development of higher education teachers' performance evaluation. In China, the changes in the evaluation of college teachers are often accompanied by the promulgation of new policies. the following parts will be sorted out in chronological order of the four stages of the change.

6. The period of workload assessment from 1978s to 1985s

Teacher evaluation in this period is mainly empirical. As some scholars^[21] argued that this workload system belongs to the qualification evaluation. In 1981, the China Ministry of Education issued the "Trial Implementation of the Workload System for Teachers in Colleges and Universities", which pointed out that colleges should divide the evaluation indicators into teaching content, teaching methods, and teaching attitudes. The assessment has a clear calculation formula, and the teacher's annual workload is calculated according to the calculation formula and work coefficient and divided the assessment results into several levels such as excellent, good, qualified, and unqualified. Although this period carried out a good exploration of the practice of Chinese teacher evaluation, it still has drawbacks, such as the lack of comprehensiveness. According to previous research, this kind of evaluation could not contain all parts of teachers' work, especially the investment in scientific research and performance cannot be calculated. Besides, since the system was often produced by the administrative department, its scientificity and rationality were difficult to be well-proven, which made it difficult to be accepted by all teachers.

7. The period of title evaluation- mid-1990s

In 1986, the Ministry of Education issued the Opinions on Reforming the Work and Improving the Employment System of Teachers' posts, which was the beginning of the reform of the qualification system for teachers' posts to the engaging system^[21].

Du and Fang^[22] found that the teaching evaluation during this period was further refined and standardized, which means taking work performance as the main indicator for the engagement and promotion of teachers. The evaluation results were directly related to teachers' rewards, promotion, and employment which stimulated teachers' development. In detail, to evaluate teachers' titles based on the principle of selection, as well as to reflect the academic level and achievements, some colleges had introduced methods such as the number of hours, papers, and projects^[21].

However, this evaluation system also caused negative consequences. On the one hand, the proportion of scientific research in teacher evaluation is increasing, which leads to a more common tendency for teachers to pay attention to scientific research and neglect teaching; on the other hand, it is affected by various rankings of schools. As a result, the consequences of teachers' pursuit of quantity but ignorance of quality have become more serious.

8. The period of position appointment and selection-the late 1990s to 2015

With the development of the market economy, some colleges and universities have begun to explore the implementation of evaluation methods that are closely linked to the distribution of allowances. At the same time, with the gradual opening of the flow of talents in colleges and universities, concurrent talent assessment work has also been carried out^[21]. Du^[22] demonstrates that this period adopts a post-appointment system, pursues absolute quantification of assessment content, and converts all teachers' teaching and research work into components, which makes results are directly linked to income and post-appointment.

There is no doubt that these measures have received positive feedback in the early stages that teachers' enthusiasm for work has increased and they have become more focused on their work^[21]. Meanwhile, some unqualified teachers have also put a lot of pressure on them. The scientific research funding and the number of articles in some universities have increased rapidly^[23]. However, issues include the use of the "piece system" originating from the production line to evaluate whether teachers engaged in mental work are suitable.

9. The period of “Double First-class” -from 2015 to now

College teachers are mental workers^[21]. According to the basic theory of performance management, assessment and evaluation should pay more attention to the overall quality development, instruct teachers to concentrate on their work, and improve the quality of work. Under the background of “Double First-class”-building First-class universities and disciplines of the world, the Chinese government published a series of policies to establish a more scientific evaluation system that emphasizes morality, ability, and performance, implementing a representative work evaluation system, and focus on the quality, contribution, and influence of iconic results^[4]. In this period, evaluation and assessment will focus on the quality requirements.

10. Problems of current performance evaluation system of higher education teachers

Simplified and digital evaluation methods are contrary to the requirements of "Double First-class" construction. Although the evaluation indicators contain most of the teachers' work, it is difficult to quantify factors such as teaching, social services, cultural inheritance, and innovation since the output effect is lagging. The number of scientific research often becomes the decisive indicator of teacher recruitment and promotion^[4].

Furthermore, the work characteristics of college teachers that pay equal attention to teaching and scientific research are ignored. Chen ^[20] argued that with the evaluation standards becoming common, the homogenization of teacher development is contrary to the original intention of "Double First-class" construction to encourage higher schools to pursue self-government and characteristic development.

Firstly, universities' diminutive departments often transform complex higher education work into simple evaluation indicators and manage teachers based on the evaluation results ^[6]. However, the design of the evaluation index system has inherent flaws that are unavoidable. According to the theory of delegated generation under multitasking, it is easy to cause the agent's effort configuration to be distorted, ignoring unmeasured but equally important tasks if the design of incentives is only based on some measurable indicators. Similarly, Jerry ^[24] demonstrated those digital indicators have a transparent and objective appearance, although the evaluation is mainly based on quantitative indicators to ensure the objectivity of the results, which ignores indicators that are difficult to measure. To be more detailed, at the university level, the quantitative evaluation focuses on scientific research, which has led to the dilution of teaching and social service functions, and factors that are difficult to measure, such as university culture and university governance, are completely ignored. As Qian ^[4] points out that the evaluation of scientific research is simplified to the evaluation of papers. Furthermore, the evaluation system that emphasizes quantity rather than quality pays attention to the practicality and utilitarianism of teachers' work, which makes it difficult for teachers to carry out their work around evaluation indicators driven by short-term practical interests and goals, and it is tough for them to assume their social responsibilities and careers ^[25].

Secondly, performance evaluation ignores the characteristics of the academic profession and lacks attention and feedback on the professional development of teachers. Most of the existing college teachers' performance evaluation content adopts uniform content and does not take into account the characteristics of teachers' personalities and professional differences, lacking a classification evaluation mechanism for teachers in different development directions ^[4]. According to Wang and Zhao^[9], this kind of assessment has converged indicators and lacks targeted assessment methods, making teacher performance management fail to achieve the expected results.

Thirdly, the content of the evaluation conflicts with the construction of "Double First-class" emphasizing the integration of scientific research and the teaching process ^[23]. Construction requires colleges to correctly balance teaching and scientific research, actively promote the integration of science and education, and realize the coordinated development of the two. However, Du and Qian ^{[4][22]} found that the evaluation system pays much more attention to scientific research results than to teaching and links the economic interests of teachers to the number of scientific research results, scientific research funding, and professional titles. In addition, the more scientific research that teachers engage in, the more resources and power they can obtain, which further strengthens the orientation of teachers in pursuing scientific research ^[6]. Moreover, those teachers who have been committed to teaching for a long time, although the quality of teaching is excellent, due to the lack of a certain number of academic papers and scientific research projects, are always at a disadvantage in terms of professional title and salary promotion and awards, and even fail to pass the performance appraisal and evaluation. Therefore, the separation of science research and the teaching process has become increasingly obvious.

Conclusion

The key to the construction of "Double First-class" in universities is to build a high-level faculty team, and it is imperative to build a scientific teacher performance evaluation system. Drawing on the previous studies, this essay summarizes the characteristics of China's performance evaluation of higher education teachers, as well as outlines its current problems of it. Many Chinese scholars have noticed these problems and provided some solutions. I argued that improving and refining the positions and attaching the work analysis so that the setting of each post is clear, scientific, and clear. Besides, constructing a professional title evaluation system that conforms to the academic output law is another solution ^[15]. As I mentioned above, although researchers have done lots of studies on the evaluation system in China during the period of "Double First-class", empirical analysis and case support are their drawbacks. Future research is required to improve this shortcoming.

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