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Research on the Optimization of University Teachers' Evaluation System from the Perspective of Performance Appraisal

Linyu Gao*

Central University of Finance and Economics, Beijing 100081, China

****Author to whom correspondence should be addressed.***

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Abstract: Teacher evaluation serves as the foundation and basis for personnel management work such as recruitment, appointment, salary distribution, rewards and punishments of university teachers. Whether an evaluation system is scientific is directly related to school-running orientation, talent-training quality and the vitality of the teaching staff. At present, teacher evaluation in some universities still has problems, including unbalanced evaluation orientation, homogenized indicators, single evaluation subjects, and insufficient utilization of evaluation results, which fall short of the requirements for deepening education-evaluation reform in the new era. Based on the actual work of universities and adopting basic concepts of performance appraisal, this paper sorts out existing problems in university-teacher evaluation systems and puts forward optimization paths from four dimensions: evaluation orientation, indicator design, evaluation methods and result utilization, so as to provide references for universities to improve teacher-evaluation systems and stimulate the vitality of teaching staff.

Keywords: Performance appraisal; University teachers; Teacher evaluation; Evaluation system; Optimization path

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1. Introduction

Teacher assessment and evaluation constitute the foundation and basis for personnel-management work, including recruitment, appointment, salary distribution, rewards, and punishments of university teachers. Evaluation orientation largely determines teachers' behavioral choices. In recent years, national and local authorities have intensively issued policies, requiring overcoming the stubborn malpractices of "valuing only scores, enrollment rates, diplomas, papers and academic titles", and deepening the reform of teacher evaluation [1]. Nevertheless, judged from the reality of universities, the problem of disconnection between assessment systems and actual school-running remains prominent, and teachers' recognition of assessments needs to be improved. Characterized by goal-orientation and process management, performance appraisal does not aim at scoring and ranking. Instead, its essence lies in guiding teachers to improve their work and promoting institutional development through

scientific evaluation. From the perspective of performance appraisal, this paper analyzes existing problems in university-teacher evaluation systems and further proposes optimization paths.

2. Existing problems in university teachers' evaluation system

2.1. Unbalanced evaluation orientation, prominent phenomenon of attaching importance to scientific research while neglecting teaching

In reality, performance distribution, professional-title evaluation, and post-promotion in most universities still mainly rely on explicit achievements such as the number of papers, project levels, and research-fund amounts. The weight of teaching workload in total assessment scores is obviously low. Teachers devote major energy to scientific research but invest insufficient effort in lesson preparation and classroom teaching. The teaching quality of some courses can hardly be guaranteed, and students end up bearing the consequences brought by unbalanced evaluation. To meet scientific-research assessment indicators, young teachers spend plenty of time on project application and paper writing, and their time for teaching-design work is severely squeezed. Sufficient attention is not paid to the training of basic teaching skills [2]. Although documents repeatedly stress that teachers' ethics and conduct shall be taken as the primary criterion for teacher evaluation, ethics assessment mostly adopts a bottom-line review. Teaching performance still carries less weight than a high-quality paper in professional-title evaluation. The basic regulation requiring professors to teach undergraduate and junior-college students is not strictly implemented in certain universities, and the frequency and duration of professors' undergraduate-class teaching cannot be guaranteed. Due to unbalanced evaluation orientation, the tendency to prioritize scientific research over teaching and knowledge imparting over student cultivation cannot be fundamentally reversed, and the central position of talent cultivation is not fully reflected in assessment links.

2.2. Homogeneous indicator setting, inadequate implementation of classified evaluation

Quite a number of universities adopt a single set of indicator systems to assess all teachers. There are few differences among teaching-oriented posts, research-oriented posts and dual-orientation posts combining teaching and research. Hardly any distinctions are made among work natures, including basic research, applied research, and social services, in indicator design. Evaluation indicators place stress on quantifiable explicit outcomes such as papers, projects and awards, while measuring work such as curriculum construction, textbook compilation, student guidance and social services in a relatively extensive manner. Moreover, the problem of valuing quantity over quality prevails. Assessments focus on the count of papers and projects rather than the actual contributions of achievements. Policies explicitly require adherence to classified guidance, setting assessment contents and evaluation methods by category, tier, and discipline, and highlighting education-and-teaching performance. However, in practical operations, many universities merely slightly adjust the weight ratio between teaching and research. Post responsibilities, disciplinary characteristics and teachers' development stages are not truly incorporated into indicator design [3]. As a result, one single standard is applied to all personnel: application-oriented teachers are forced to compete for papers; teachers of arts and physical education are assessed according to science-and-engineering criteria; teaching-oriented teachers remain at a long-term disadvantage. The requirement of "evaluating teachers according to what they undertake" can hardly be put into practice. Assessment indicators in some universities have not been revised for years. New requirements such as teaching reform and curriculum ideological-and-political education fail to be incorporated into indicator systems in a timely way, and assessment contents are disconnected from institutional development priorities.

2.3. Single evaluation subjects, relatively weak process-oriented evaluation

Assessments of university teachers are mostly led by personnel departments and organized by schools and departments. Although links such as student teaching evaluation, peer review, and supervisor classroom inspection have been widely established, their operational quality varies greatly. Student teaching evaluation consists of final-term scoring, which is affected by factors such as course difficulty and scoring leniency, resulting in limited discrimination. Peer review mostly takes place in internal faculty meetings. Restrained by personal relationships, comments tend to be similar and opinions remain general. Classroom inspections by supervisors have limited coverage and cannot fully reflect real classroom conditions. Assessment information mainly comes from forms and materials submitted intensively at year-end. There is no systematic collection of teachers' daily teaching records and student-cultivation outcomes, leading to insufficient process-oriented data. Assessments largely turn into "form-filling contests" [4]. The administrative nature of assessment organization puts teachers in a passive, responsive state. They consume massive time and energy on submitting various materials, and feel more burdened than rewarded by assessments. Policies call for improving result-oriented evaluation, strengthening process-oriented evaluation, exploring value-added evaluation and perfecting multi-subject evaluation mechanisms. Still, assessments in most universities remain at the level of final-term overall reckoning, which undermines the scientific nature and objectivity of evaluation [5].

2.4. Insufficient utilization of results, inadequate performance of incentive and restraint functions

Assessment results are not closely linked with incentive-and-restraint measures such as performance-related pay, professional-title evaluation, post-appointment, and merit evaluation. In some universities, gaps in performance distribution are small. There is little difference between "competent" and "basically competent" assessment results, reflecting a certain degree of egalitarianism. For teachers with low assessment rankings, targeted support, warning and exit arrangements are absent, and the "up-or-down" mechanism for post-term assessment is hard to implement. Meanwhile, feedback mechanisms for assessment results are imperfect. Most teachers only receive a final grade without knowing their own gaps and directions for improvement. The connection between assessment results and further training, as well as professional development, is loose, failing to embody developmental functions. Policies require taking assessment results as important grounds for professional-title evaluation, performance distribution, merit evaluation and further training, and establishing hierarchical feedback mechanisms for assessment results [6]. In practice, assessments are emphasized while result utilization is neglected. The baton effect of evaluation is greatly weakened, and teachers' enthusiasm for improving work can hardly be mobilized. In individual universities, assessment results are even decoupled from performance bonus payment, making assessments a mere formality and arousing teachers' doubts about assessment seriousness.

3. Optimization paths for university teachers' evaluation system from the perspective of performance appraisal

3.1. Uphold morality-centered talent cultivation and reshape evaluation orientation attaching equal importance to teaching and scientific research

To optimize teacher-evaluation systems, addressing the orientation issue of "what to assess" is a top priority. Universities shall take the outcomes of fostering virtue through education as the fundamental criterion for evaluating teachers' work, put teachers' ethics and conduct assessment first, strictly implement the

negative-list system for ethics assessment and the one-vote-veto rule for ethics violations, and regard ethical performance as the primary requirement for teachers' performance assessment, professional-title evaluation, post-appointment and merit rewards. In terms of education and teaching, teaching performance shall truly enjoy equal importance with research performance. Minimum class-hour requirements for professors teaching undergraduate and junior-college students shall be clarified and incorporated into post-term assessment. Work including lesson preparation and lecturing, curriculum construction, textbook compilation, guiding graduation projects and disciplinary competitions, and serving as class teachers or counselors shall be counted in the teaching workload. Explore taking comprehensive teaching-quality evaluation results as an important basis for professional-title evaluation and performance distribution [7]. In terms of scientific-research evaluation, uphold the orientation of quality priority. Quantifiable research indicators such as paper count, project quantity and research-fund amount shall not be directly linked with performance-related-pay distribution and rewards. Adopt representative-achievement evaluation, and comprehensively assess teachers' academic contributions, social contributions and performance in supporting talent cultivation. Meanwhile, incorporate teachers' professional development into the assessment scope. Rely on faculty-development centers to provide teaching training and career guidance for teachers, so that evaluation and development can promote each other [8]. As specific implementation entities of assessments, schools and departments shall formulate detailed rules in light of disciplinary realities, and translate institutional-level orientation requirements into operable and verifiable concrete criteria. The formulation of evaluation indicators shall also consider universities' development stages. Newly-established undergraduate universities, application-oriented undergraduate universities and high-level research-oriented universities shall have different assessment priorities instead of simply copying practices from other institutions. Orientation adjustment is bound to touch existing interest patterns. Universities shall help teachers understand reform intentions via policy publicity and scheme demonstration, so that evaluation can truly return to the essence of talent cultivation.

3.2. Implement classified and tiered evaluation and scientifically set differentiated indicator systems

Clear standards and distinguishable assessment objects serve as prerequisites for performance appraisal. Universities shall put classified evaluation into practice according to institutional positioning and teachers' post responsibilities. Specifically, teachers can be divided into teaching-oriented, research-oriented, dual-orientation (teaching-and-research) and social-service-oriented groups by post type. Distinguish basic research, applied research, humanities-and-social sciences, arts and physical education by disciplinary characteristics. Differentiate newly-recruited teachers, young teachers, backbone teachers and senior teachers according to career-development stages. Set assessment contents and evaluation methods by category, tier and discipline [9]. Indicator design shall combine qualitative and quantitative approaches: for hard-to-quantify contents such as teachers' ethics, teaching quality and student-cultivation outcomes, adopt qualitative judgment combining student evaluation, peer review, supervisor evaluation and teacher self-assessment. For quantifiable contents such as research outputs and project funds, set reasonable quality thresholds instead of simple quantity accumulation. For basic research, focus on academic contributions and theoretical standards. For applied research, emphasize achievement transformation and practical benefits. For instance, for teaching-oriented teachers, prioritize classroom-teaching quality, curriculum-construction outcomes and student-cultivation results, and appropriately lower requirements for research indicators. For application-oriented-research teachers, incorporate technology transfer, achievement transformation and social-service benefits into

assessment, and allow high-quality representative achievements to replace quantity requirements for general outcomes [10]. The determination of indicator weights shall solicit opinions from schools, departments and front-line teachers, avoiding arbitrary decisions solely made by administrative departments. Evaluation criteria shall establish dynamic-adjustment mechanisms and be revised in a timely manner according to institutional development priorities and faculty conditions, preventing long-term solidification and disconnection from realities. Only when teachers of various types have clear directions for efforts can evaluations gain teachers' recognition and guide teachers to give full play to their strengths [11].

3.3. Improve multi-subject evaluation mechanism and strengthen process management and value-added evaluation

Assessments with single subjects and concentrated time points can hardly fully reflect teachers' work. Improvements shall be made in both evaluation subjects and evaluation approaches. In terms of subjects, perfect the comprehensive-evaluation mechanism combining teacher self-assessment, student evaluation, peer review and supervisor evaluation. Appropriately introduce external information such as student-development data and feedback from employing entities. For student teaching evaluation, improve scale design and combine evaluation results with background factors, including curriculum nature and student grade levels, to avoid simple ranking. For peer review, build standardized expert-review pools and implement peer-expert review for representative achievements to reduce interference from personal relationships. For supervisor evaluation, expand classroom-inspection coverage and stress observation and recording of daily teaching processes [12]. In terms of methods, combine process-oriented evaluation and result-oriented evaluation. Rely on educational-administration and research-management information systems to build teachers' teaching-work archives and research-performance ledgers for continuous recording of teachers' daily performance, avoiding messy year-end summaries. Explore value-added evaluation for incremental content such as teaching improvement and student growth, and pay attention to teachers' progress on the basis of their original conditions. For teachers engaged in basic research, implement long-cycle evaluation. In principle, the research-evaluation cycle shall be no less than three years to encourage teachers to devote themselves to research and make long-term accumulations [13]. Universities shall strengthen the collection and sharing of evaluation data to reduce repeated form-filling work for teachers, freeing them from paperwork so that they can concentrate on teaching and student cultivation. Assessment frequency shall also differ for various posts. For basic-research-oriented teachers, combine annual assessment and periodic assessment instead of taking the annual cycle as the sole assessment unit . Improvements to evaluation approaches shall fully take disciplinary differences into consideration. Teaching evaluation for arts, physical-education and practical courses shall be distinguished from that for theoretical courses, and adopt suitable approaches to measure teachers' real contributions.

3.4. Strengthen result utilization and perfect feedback, incentive and restraint mechanisms

The vitality of evaluation lies in result utilization. Universities shall closely link assessment results with teachers' vital interests, create real gaps, reward excellence and punish poor performance. Take assessment results as important grounds for performance-related-pay distribution, professional-title evaluation, post-appointment, merit evaluation, and further training. Give preference to front-line teachers and those with outstanding education-and-teaching outcomes in performance distribution. Appropriately raise the proportion of basic performance-related pay for full-time teaching-oriented teachers. For teachers with excellent

assessment results, offer preferences in professional-title evaluation, further training and merit evaluation, so that teachers devoted to teaching and student cultivation can obtain tangible rewards [14]. Meanwhile, perfect assessment-result feedback mechanisms. Universities together with schools and departments shall organize assessment interviews, feed assessment results, existing problems and development suggestions back to individual teachers, help them formulate personal-development plans, and give play to the diagnostic and improvement functions of evaluation. For teachers with poor assessment results, offer training and guidance for improvement first. For those genuinely incompetent, handle their cases in accordance with laws and regulations based on post-term assessment outcomes to realize dynamic mobility of staff [15]. Assessment processes shall guarantee teachers' rights to know and appeal, and smooth appeal channels to enhance assessment credibility. For common problems reflected in assessments, universities shall improve management systems and service provision in a timely way, and apply assessment results to governance links such as resource allocation and faculty staffing, forming a complete closed loop of assessment-feedback-improvem ent. By combining incentives with restraints and attaching equal importance to feedback and development, evaluations shall become ladders for teachers' growth rather than burdens.

4. Conclusion

The reform of university-teacher evaluation systems is a systematic project where one move may affect the whole picture. From the perspective of performance appraisal, the key to evaluation reform does not lie in adjusting assessment frequency or indicator quantity, but in whether the orientation is correct, standards are scientific, processes are transparent and results are effective. Universities shall steadily promote the optimization of evaluation systems in light of their own institutional positioning and faculty realities, implement the fundamental task of fostering virtue through education, stimulate faculty vitality via scientific evaluation, and provide solid talent support for the connotative development of higher education.

Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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