

Towards a Multi-source Performance Appraisal Model in Omani Higher Education Institutions

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Abstract

Higher education institutions (HEIs), across the globe, have been increasingly applying staff performance appraisals (PA) to ensure good quality educational outcomes, and to meet the requirements of national and international quality assurance and academic accreditation organizations. Staff at the forefront of PA since they are affected either positively or negatively by the outcome of the process. PA models and the way the process is conducted have long been a controversial issue among both academics and administrators in HEIs. The core of the debate is that PA models and their implementations may not always be sufficiently comprehensive, transparent, and fair enough to accurately and realistically reflect staff performance. Focusing on English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers in an Omani private university, the present study is aimed to investigate EFL teachers' views and perceptions about PA and the implementation practices with a view of providing some recommendations that could help improve the process. Most previous relevant studies in the literature seem to have addressed PA from a theoretical perspective, and there seems to be a lack of empirical studies. In contrast, the present study attempted to explore the issue more empirically, and to this end, the study adopted an exploratory qualitative research methodology with semi-structured interviews being the main method of data collection. Ten EFL teachers took part in the investigation through face-to-face tape-recorded interviews. Results indicated dissatisfaction with the PA system and its implementation, suggesting a number of deficiencies. Participants also questioned the validity of the prime role given to students in the evaluation of teachers in the PA process as well as the lack of effective criteria and transparency in the choice of peer appraisers. Moreover, the lack of communication and training of both appraisers and appraisees were among the major issues reported by the participants. Implications for PA practices improvement and advancement were presented and discussed.

Key words: multi-source model, performance appraisal, qualitative, EFL teachers, Omani HEIs

Cite as: Alhassan, A., & Ali, H. I. H. (2019). Towards a Multi-source Performance Appraisal Model in Omani Higher Education Institutions. *Arab World English Journal*, 10 (4) 299-312.

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol10no4.22>

1. Introduction

Performance appraisal (PA) is a formal and systematic process whereby staff members of an organization are evaluated by managers in relation to their performance against a set of certain pre-determined measures in order to ensure and maintain accountability and the quality of institutional operations. In higher education institutions, PA is normally conducted for both academic and non-academic staff in line with the individual institution's mission, vision, and core values. PA offers opportunities for both management and staff to identify, observe, measure, and develop human resources in organizations (Cardy & Dobbins, 1993, as cited in Park, 2009, p. 60). PA can also help highlight the continual professional development (CPD) needs of staff to sustain strengths and overcome weaknesses in order to improve performance and to meet the growing demands of the constantly changing academic world. According to Brown, Hyatt and Benson (2010), many empirical studies have suggested that PAs often produce an increase in employee performance and productivity derived from employee identification with and commitment to the objectives of the organization. Employees, with low performance, are normally identified during the PA and given timely feedback on how to improve.

Measuring and evaluating the PA of teaching staff in higher education institutions does not seem an easy and straightforward process, given the changing role of staff in advancing the knowledge of students (Guruprasad, Sridhar & Balasubramanian, 2016, p.1). However, different higher education institutions have different models of PA. These models reflect the main principles and guidelines set by national and/or international quality assurance and academic accreditation organizations. PA has significant ramifications on staff retention or dismissal. Institutions often use the PA outcomes to reward, promote, renew, or even terminate contracts. Accordingly, PA has both developmental and judgmental consequences. The former is viewed as a positive practice that reflects the institution's good intention and keenness to retain its staff by continually evaluating their performance and identifying their performance deficiencies and needs with the aim of providing them with the necessary and relevant training and professional development programmes that can maximize and sustain their performance. The latter, however, often suggests an institutional practice that does not care about staff retention and CPD. This could lead to an organization losing out on recruiting and retaining employees. Indeed, if employees with low PA scores are not helped out professionally, they are more likely to be subject to job dissatisfaction, lack of organizational commitment, which might ultimately lead them to quit the job (Brown et al., 2010). The critical issue is the extent to which individual organizations can strike the balance between the judgmental and developmental nature of performance appraisal in order to maintain and sustain high-quality performance management. Focusing on the Omani HE context, the current study aims to investigate EFL teachers' experiences about PA systems and their implementation mechanisms in their relevant institutions with the view to further improving performance management practices and broadening academic staff understanding of PA, as well as to exploring the extent to which current PA practices reflect a multi-source, comprehensive, fair and transparent model. The study is intended to propose recommendations and insights that could help improve PA practices in the context of the study and beyond in other similar contexts. The study primarily addresses three main research questions: how do EFL teachers perceive their existing performance appraisal practices? To what extent do these practices reflect the principles of a multi-source performance model? And, what could be done to improve the existing performance appraisal practices?

2. Context

The Sultanate of Oman (henceforth Oman) is a Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) state located in the southern part of the Arabian Peninsula with a population of around 4.5 million. Higher education in Oman is relatively young and is still growing. The first publically -funded university in the country was established in 1986. More expansion in the sector started in the 1990s and, since then, a large number of HE institutions have been established. Currently, Oman has a substantial number of both governmental and private universities, colleges, and institutes offering a range of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in various disciplines of knowledge. All these institutions are supervised and monitored by the Omani Ministry of Higher Education as the main regulatory body (Al-Lamki, 2002). The study was conducted in an Omani private university. The university strives to achieve excellence as a national higher education provider and to offer quality higher education. It is an English-medium university offering a range of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in humanities, social sciences, and applied sciences. The university has a PA system in place for the annual evaluation of the performance of its academic staff with consequences for staff retention (contract renewal) or dismissal (contract termination).

2.1 Quality assurance and academic accreditation in the Omani HEIs

Over the last decade, Oman has adopted a rigorous and comprehensive national quality assurance system encompassing a range of interconnected frameworks and processes to ensure high-quality education (Carroll, Razvi, Goodliffe & Al-Habsi, 2009). There have generally been ongoing national efforts to foster and promote quality assurance in Omani higher education institutions by establishing a national quality assurance system to implement and sustain institutional accreditation across the country (Carroll et al., 2009, Lontok, Al-Ghassani & Al-Saidi, 2013). As a practical step towards achieving this aim, a royal decree was issued in 2010 to establish an independent national authority: The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA) to oversee and regulate quality assurance and academic accreditation for HE institutions. The royal decree clearly stated that OAAA is responsible for regulating the quality of higher education in Oman to ensure the maintenance of a level that meets international standards, and to encourage higher education institutions to improve their internal quality systems (<http://www.oaaa.gov.om>). The OAAA is an entity with legal, financial, and administrative independence. Introducing PA in higher education institutions was viewed as a means for increasing the overall effectiveness and efficiency of these institutions (Haslam, Bryman & Webb, 1993) to sustain quality education and obtain institutional accreditation. OAAA has mandated that PA is to be an integral part of Omani higher education institutions' management. OAAA published a number of guidelines to promote and sustain quality assurance in the Omani HEIs with reference to PA. All staff are appraised annually. The supervisor discusses the implementation of the performance appraisal scheme with each staff member before he or she is evaluated, clearly specifying the performance criteria. Confidential formal consultations regarding the results of evaluation should be held with each staff member and should be supportive. Where performance is considered less than satisfactory, clear requirements for improvement should be established. The HEIs should have a performance planning and review policy as well as procedures for undertaking staff performance review and they should be readily accessible and effectively communicated to all staff. HEIs should also ensure that all academic and non-academic staff members participate in performance planning and review at least annually, with the opportunity to engage them into the PA process. HEIs should also ensure that formal performance planning and review outcomes are documented and retained

confidentially and their relevant staff members have the opportunity to provide their own comments on the files, including points of disagreement with the opportunity to appeal against any negative performance review outcomes. Outstanding academic or administrative performance should be recognized and rewarded. Supervisors should discuss with their staff strategies for development of skills and career advancement. Supervisors should also assist in arranging professional development activities, including upgrading of qualifications (<http://www.oaaa.gov.om>).

3. Theoretical background

The process of the design, implementation, and management of the PA of academic staff in higher education institutions poses significant challenges due to the complex nature of the process and its consequences on both the individual staff and the institutions (Decramer, 2012). Since PA is a cyclical and systematic process whereby employees are evaluated for their performance, its management, defining, measuring, evaluating and rewarding people's performance in an organization (Den Hartog, Boselie & Paauwe, 2004), is equally a complex and challenging process. It is used as a tool in HE to manage quality and enhance institutional performance and contributions to the wider community. Performance management (PM) is an instrument for achieving superior outcomes from the entire organization. PM, and particularly PA as an aspect of it, is a systematic process in which employees are given feedback on their performance and further reward and promotion (Igbojekwe, Ugo-Okoro & Agbonye, 2015). Additionally, PA is also viewed as a formal management system that provides for the evaluation of the quality of individuals' performance in an organization (Meenaksh, 2012). One of the main foci of PA is to address areas and skills such as team work, character, and leadership effectiveness, planning skills and goal-setting strategies that all assist employees to create their professional development plans and understand the relevant organizational needs. Measuring behaviors and competencies could provide insights into the types of skills and behaviors desired in organizations to accomplish their missions, visions, and core values. Another equally important area is the training of both the appraisers and appraisees on how to work out scores and effectively handle PA forms and formalities.

PA is primarily viewed as the process of identifying, observing, measuring, and developing human resources in organizations (Cardy & Dobbins, 1994, as cited in Pak, 2009, p. 60). The underlying theme among all these definitions and views is that PA serves both judgmental and developmental purposes with regard to staff performance evaluation in any organization. However, a multi-source PA has always been seen as developmental rather than judgmental, since the main goal is to assess individual performance in terms of strengths and weakness, and to identify unmet professional needs. In HEIs, data for such comprehensive models are normally expected to be obtained from multiple sources, including but not limited to the data from students, peers, self-assessment, stakeholders, supervisors, and line managers. A multi-source PA should be viewed as a performance management system and should underpin the overall strategic plan of the organization providing a more complete picture for staff performance and it should function as a reflective tool for all levels (Anjum, Yasmeen & Khan, 2011; Alexander, 2006; Fleenor, 1997; Fletcher, 2001:). Moreover, in order to achieve sensible and trustworthy PA practices, both appraisers and appraisees should be involved in the development of the PA system. Indeed, the importance of employee participation in the PA process is well documented and emphasized in the

literature (see e.g., Anjum et al., 2011; Brutus, London & Martineau, 1999; Holi, 2012). If employees feel that the PA process is unfair, unsystematic and not thorough enough, it is unlikely that they would accept its outcomes. To avoid such situations, there should be clear and agreed upon performance measures and criteria. Transparency should also be maintained throughout the process by clearly communicating PA results to the concerned individual staff members and these results should remain confidential.

3.1 Sources of information for PA in HEIs

There is a range of sources usually used in higher education institutions to implement and manage PAs. The most commonly used sources include student evaluations of their teachers, line managers' ratings, peer and subordinate ratings, and research and teaching metrics (Brutus et al., 1999). However, the validity, reliability and the weightage of these sources have been questioned by researchers (see e.g., Borman 1998;). Line manager evaluation is considered to be one of the most important sources as supervisors control rewards and career progressions and promotions (Brutus et al., 1999). Furthermore, peer rating is also viewed as a valid source of performance information as peers work closely with each other, and they have the opportunities to observe and know each other more closely in the workplace settings. Peer ratings can be done in forms of classroom observations or checklists and narrative statements (Nair, Li & Cai, 2015). However, the selection of peers remains a controversial issue as, in some cases, peers may invalidate the information gathered due to work and personal relationships between the appraisers and the appraisees (Bell, 2011). Additionally, self-ratings are another integral source for PA where an individual staff member rates his/her performance according to certain given measures and criteria. However, self-ratings can be a poor source of performance evaluation as they may involve some kind of leniency and biases (Harris & Schaubroeck, 1988; Atwater, 1998). Finally, research and teaching components of PA are also considered as two significant performance indicators in higher education. However, there is no clear definition of quality and quantity of academic work with regard to both research and teaching (Nair et al., 2015). Although HEIs have reasonably common goals for measuring staff performance with regard to their achievement, they still vary significantly in their focus in relation to teaching and research.

3.2 Critical issues in performance appraisal in HEIs

PA practices tend to have several issues that could potentially undermine the validity and reliability of the whole process. Among these issues is the rating inflation which is the tendency of appraisers to give appraisees higher ranking than they realistically deserve. This seems to be a serious problem with PA as it could make it difficult to discriminate an average performance from an outstanding one (Martin & Bartol, 1998). On the other hand, severity, as opposed to leniency, is considered as one of the common errors where appraisers give appraisees lower ratings than they actually deserve. Another concern is when appraisers choose the middle point in any range of the scale to play safe, but this may not effectively illustrate the actual performance. Yet one more serious issue is what is known as "Halo effect", which is the tendency to judge the appraisee's performance by only one particular aspect (Boachie-Mensah et al., 2012., Prowse & Prowse, 2009; To, 2007). Additionally, another commonly known issue is stereotyping: the pre-judgment of a person's performance on the basis of general beliefs about characteristics such as gender, age, race, and nationality. Some appraisers also have the tendency to negatively view all behaviors or actions of a subordinate because the superior dislikes a particular behavior or action of the appraisee

(Lefkowitz, 2000, Boachie-Mensah et al., 2012). Finally, the error of strictness is another issue that occurs when appraisers give unfavorable or poor appraisal regardless of the actual performance level of the appraisee. In the view of Tziner and Kopeman (2002, as cited in Boachie-Mensah et al., 2012), the main reason for this practice is that the appraisers may be uncomfortable with that successful appraisees may replace them in the future. It is also they want to create the impression that they are hard and strict in their evaluation.

Furthermore, another major critical issue with PA, is the key role given to student ratings to measure instructors' teaching performance and effectiveness has been an important but controversial tool in the improvement of teaching quality during the last past decades (Spooren, Mortelmans & Thijssen, 2012). The use of student evaluations of their teachers to measure their performance has become extremely popular in many universities around the world (Becker & Watts, 1999). However, there are a number of concerns regarding the use of student evaluations for managing staff performance. Student evaluations of teachers might divert teachers from activities that have a higher learning content for students and concentrate more on classroom entertainment to please their students and thus gaining high teaching ratings (Braga, Paccagnella & Pellizzari, 2014). Features of a good teacher evaluation system should reflect, among other things, the clarity of the purposes and criteria of the evaluation system, perceived fairness and accuracy of the evaluation system, teacher satisfaction with their performance and the evaluation process such as the credibility of the evaluators, the relationship between the evaluator and the teachers, and the utility of the feedback (see e.g, Holi, 2013).

4. Methodology

A total number of ten participants agreed to take part in this study through tape-recorded face-to-face interviews. All participants were EFL teachers with different ranks and years of experience in the profession. Their ranks ranged from lecturers, assistant to associate professors with a minimum of six and a maximum of twenty-five years of experience in the field of TEFL/TESOL and applied linguistics. They comprised both Omani nationals and international expatriates coming from diverse national, educational, and cultural backgrounds. They all have gone, at different times, through the experience of staff performance appraisal.

Being an exploratory in nature, the study adopted a qualitative methodology with semi-structured interviews being the principal method of data collection. Prompt cards were used during interviews at some points in a discourse-based format (Lillis, 2001; Odell et al., 1983) to help elicit more focused and detailed responses from the participants. Participants were given the prompt cards and given some time to go through the cards and they were then invited to react to the prompts by a number of questions, probes, and follow-up questions. One interview was conducted with each of the participants and each individual interview lasted between 25-45 minutes. All interviews were transcribed verbatim and coded thematically and inductively. Inter-rater reliability checks were conducted (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Coding disagreements were resolved, and codes were modified and refined accordingly to ensure that they accurately represented and captured the participants' views and perspectives.

5. Results and discussion

This section reports the key findings of the study. Participants expressed their views in regard to five key elements in PA namely, efficiency and effectiveness of the existing system, student evaluations, peer-ratings, staff involvement in developing appraisal tools and mechanisms, and research and teaching components in the PA system.

5.1 Efficiency and effectiveness of the existing PA system

Participants acknowledged the importance of having a PA system in place, and they appreciated the value of such a system in developing and monitoring their professionalism, while aspiring for further improvement:

If you look at the policy and the way it is conducted, it's not bad. Nothing negative about it. Intentions are good. The intention is to improve the overall situation, teaching, learning, research, community service. And it is linked with the performance, actually. How you perform. So, if the performance appraisal is not there, and [not] this elaborate and this strict, then the faculty member themselves will not know where they stand, especially their weak areas where they need improvement.

This echoes what is frequently reported in the literature and mandated by both the nationally and internationally recognized standards with regard to the significance of PA in the HEIs.

A teacher added:

I think that there's a huge emphasis on research and getting published. I think our course load is very high for that. I think that people need professional development. They need mentoring in how to get published, where to get published. We need to know what's available. We're given a list of Scopus journals. How do we know what's best for us in our subject area? Even I need help. I'm sure you do too. We all need help

Another teacher added:

Appraisal should be developmental rather than judgemental, on the whole, yes, the intention is to make a development, that weak areas are identified and the authorities have- like the Dean of the college and the Head of the department, they sit with the faculty member while you're finalising it and they highlight that these are the weak areas based on the results. What is your professional development plan? They take some kind of undertaking which will be reviewed in the subsequent similar meetings.

These findings lend support to previous studies (e.g., Nair et al., 2015) in that HEIs often do not adequately provide a clear definition of quality and quantity of the published work in the PA system with regard to research element. In some teaching-oriented HEIs, the research component is not expected to have a higher weight than teaching in the PA process. The view that appraisal is to be developmental rather than judgmental is also highlighted in the literature (e.g., Brown et al., 2009). This is because when not supported professionally following the PA outcomes, staff may feel less enthusiastic and less committed to the organization and might ultimately quit their jobs.

5.2 Student evaluations in PA

Teachers contested the prime role given to students as evaluators of their teachers' performance, critiquing the high weight given to student evaluations, among other elements, in the teaching part of the appraisal system.

In my view, the best approach to address this problem, is that only the best students should be chosen to appraise and not everybody. There are students who are really careless, and they are lazy, and they are not interested in anything. How can they evaluate the active member of staff?

In the same vein, teachers also voiced their concerns about the student ability to accurately evaluate and judge their performance in the teaching:

Having all students evaluating you, you shouldn't allow everybody, because some of them actually have no right to do the evaluation because their maths is very low, and they are always having problems with their attendance. And accordingly, it's very difficult for them to give a proper, I can't say objective judgement or evaluation of their staff, especially if the staff are highly experienced.

On the contrary, another teacher said:

The best people to judge teaching and learning are the students who see and who form creating impressions about their teachers. So teachers and the students; this is mutual. So, we take students' feedback and there is an online form for that. Maybe some representatives from each class, if they also do some kind of peer evaluation. If I'm appraising somebody for their teaching, I want to make sure that students' voices are heard, which is the case in the university.

From the above, it is clearly that teachers have mixed views with regard to the role of students in PA. While it is generally acknowledged as the evaluation of one of the important stakeholders, some teachers, however, questioned the students' ability to accurately judge and evaluate the teaching performance. Similar findings are highlighted in the literature (e.g., Becker & Watts, 1999; Braga et al., 2014) in that students' views are not always without problems and biases. Braga et al. (2014), for example, suggested that if teachers feel that students have a strong role in the evaluation of teachers with implications for career and retention in the institution, teachers might run the risk of diverting their focus from real teaching and learning activities with higher learning content for students, and rather concentrate more on other classroom entertainment that please their students and thus gaining higher teaching ratings.

5.3 Teachers' views about peer-evaluation

Participants critiqued the choice, validity, and reliability of peer appraisers, calling for rigorous criteria to maintain objectivity and minimize subjectivity in the role of peers in the PA system.

I think it (peer ratings) should be anonymous. In the past, it was not. A faculty member gets to select who should appraise them and that person is known to the individual. I think that increases the level of subjectivity because, at the end of the

day, this person is a colleague. You want to make sure that you don't want to create any sort of negative relationship between the appraiser and the appraisee. I think it should be somebody who's from the same field. Somebody's field of study and field of research for evaluating a researcher. I also think it should be somebody who has established himself or herself as somebody respected in the field. I don't want somebody who's never done research before to evaluate a very active researcher unless it's just for the sake of feedback and not for the sake of development and advancement. I also want to make sure that the appraiser knows the appraisee very well in terms of their activities and what they're involved in.

In the same line, another teacher said:

The current peer appraisal is mostly like, "This is my buddy, wink, wink, nudge, nudge. I'll give you all the fives. You give me all fives." To me, it doesn't have any meaning at all. I also want to make sure that colleagues or peers have a say in what this teacher is doing, how he is contributing to the team and the community. If the peer chosen by the faculty member himself or herself doesn't give the grade or score of the individual's choice, it might affect their relationship.

These findings echo similar concerns reported in previous studies in that peers might not always provide objective and genuine accounts to evaluate their colleagues. For example, personal relationships might compromise objectivity (Bell, 2001).

5.4 Staff involvement in the development of PA

Participants articulated deficiencies in the current PA system with regard to the lack of staff involvement and participation in the design and implementation of the system.

It's also extremely important to make sure that all the aspects or everybody involved in the teaching, learning, research or serving the community should be involved somehow in the appraisal system. We're talking about teachers. We're talking about students and line managers.

Another teacher added:

Faculty members or teachers, especially if they help in redesigning the system, should trust the system. They should know the system is fair. They should know it is not going to be used against them and it is for the sake of advancement and development rather than making judgments.

These findings confirmed what was suggested in the previous relevant studies in that staff participation and involvement in the design and development of PA systems are more likely to make them more effective and trusted than those which are solely designed by administrators and supervisors (Cox, 2000). Staff participation in the PA process could also yield positive effects on them and foster their motivation. Moreover, this participation should be preceded by adequate training for both appraisers and appraisees to help minimize any potential problems and errors with the PA process.

5.5 Research and teaching in PA

Data also showed that participants had some concerns with regard to the overemphasis placed on the research component in the PA system. Participating teachers expressed their views about the current PA with regard to publications by questioning the research weightage and the validity of information in the PA system. They believed that the institution should offer time and professional development activities with regard to research before incorporating it as an integral component in the PA.

The weightage given to research has been given more importance [in the PA system] compared to previous years. Previous years it was worth 40% of the total score. This year it's been increased to 50% based on the recommendations of the Minister of Higher Education. Where the national goal is to publish more, to have the institutions move towards being research institutions rather than teaching institutions.

In a similar vein, another teacher added:

The major challenge is the lack of time allocated for staff to conduct and publish research. Staff do not have enough time to conduct research when the teaching load has not actually been reduced. The teaching load is still the same but faculty members are expected to focus more on research rather than teaching. That has been a challenge, and I think it is going to continue to be a challenge for at least a couple of years until the university revisits and designs a new PA policy.

These findings indicate similar concerns highlighted in the literature (e.g., Nair et al., 2015; Igbojekwe et al., 2015) in that HEIs often expect staff to engage actively in research as PA requirement and publication. Our findings, however, suggest that without considering the focus of the institutions (whether being a research or teaching-oriented) nor considering the existing facilities and time allocated to staff to individual staff to produce quality research, the research component in the PA should be considered with caution to avoid underestimating other relevant rating sources.

6. Conclusions and recommendations

This is a relatively small-scale exploratory qualitative study that focused on a single context with only ten participants, so some caution should be taken when interpreting the findings and implications. However, we believe that the study has provided some illuminating and useful insights to inform both academics and administrators in designing, implementing, monitoring, and managing PA in a more effective manner in higher education institutions. There is clear evidence that PA practices operate in a complex web of academic and social factors, and the appraisees have a range of concerns regarding the validity and reliability of the PA models and its implementation process.

Based on the overall objectives and the research questions addressed in the study, and in the light of the study findings, a number of recommendations can be offered to improve PA practices in Omani higher education institutions, and beyond in similar contexts.

As for student evaluation, it should be taken with care and should not be given higher weight in the appraisal process at the expense of other sources. Students should be trained on how to rate their instructors to reduce the impressionistic effects and also need to be encouraged to separate the quality of instruction from the grade they expect to receive in class. Balancing and weighting items within the PA forms/questionnaires or checklists could affect rating. Some researchers have suggested replacing student evaluation forms with teaching portfolios that could be updated and used annually (e.g., Cook, 1989; Marsh, 1991a). Moreover, training is equally important for raters and appraisers on how to rate others and carry out performance appraisal efficiently. There is evidence that not all staff members are actively involved in the design and development of PA mechanisms, tools, and plans. Involving faculty in the process may reduce skepticism and improve the validity and reliability of the PA systems. PAs should be based on a multi-source model in order to become more comprehensive, fair, representative, and acceptable. As for the choice and selection of peer appraisers, there should be clear, rigorous, and well-articulated criteria as well as effective mechanisms within the system to minimize any potential subjectivity and errors in the PA process. There should also be realistic PA for staff, taking into consideration the job descriptions. For instance, a staff member whose job is only teaching should not be appraised against any research measures. Given that the research component is often highly valued in the PA process, HEIs should strive to allocate enough time, resources, and funds for staff in order to produce high-quality research and publications not only for appraisal purposes, but also for the continuing professional development. Additionally, given the paucity of empirical research in the context of the study, it is expected that the findings of the study could motivate researchers and serve as a basis for further empirical studies in the field.

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