

Challenges in Teachers' Performance Appraisal: A Qualitative Study on Structural Flaws and Systemic Inequities

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Abstract

This research article is a qualitative study on the structural flaws and systemic inequities in teacher performance appraisal practices in Malaysian primary schools. Adapting the in-depth interviews with three experienced school teachers from three different schools in Selangor, the data were analysed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis framework. This research explores how appraisal processes are experienced on the ground, particularly regarding the matter of fairness and recognition. Four main themes emerged: administrative bias, lack of transparency, diminished teachers' morale or motivation, and the urgent need for systemic reform. Teachers described the appraisal systems as inconsistent, vague, and often shaped by favouritism rather than objectivity in the performance measured. Theoretically, the study advances Adams' Equity Theory by demonstrating how sustained imbalances between teachers' effort and recognition, produced by both distributive and procedural injustice, are contributing to demotivation, distrust in leadership, and disengagement from professional growth. From a practical view, the findings accentuate the need for policy-oriented transformation, which includes the implementation of systemic rubrics, transparent evaluation procedures, and structured mentoring mechanisms. These strategies are demanding in aiming to restore appraisal credibility, strengthen teacher motivation, and enhance institutional trust. This study utilised Adams' Equity Theory in teachers' performance appraisals, and it demonstrates that inequitable practices occurred in schools and hopes to offer evidence-based insights to educational policymakers and school leaders to seek and redesign the appraisal practices by promoting equity, accountability, and sustainable teacher development.

Keywords:

Performance Appraisal, Structural Flaws, Inequities, Organizational Justice, Teacher

INTRODUCTION

Teacher performance appraisal practices are a crucial mechanism and process to maintain accountability and support professional development within schools. These systems are designed to evaluate teaching effectiveness, provide constructive and meaningful feedback, and at the same time align teachers' individual professional development with schools' performance objectives (Smith & Johnson, 2022). When implemented effectively, teacher appraisals improve instructional quality among leaders, promote professional growth, and contribute to comprehensive school improvement (Fuzi & Yuzi, 2019). However, multiple studies highlight persistent challenges, including the absence of transparency, administrative

bias, and systemic inequities between both leaders and teachers in schools (Jones & Johnson, 2021). These issues not only compromise the integrity of appraisal processes but also have an adverse impact on teacher morale and trust.

Fairness and transparency are among essential principles that determine teachers' perceptions of appraisals' legitimacy and equitability. Fairness is defined as unbiased with a standardized evaluation criterion, while transparency within the criteria ensures that the assessment methods are clearly conveyed (Williams & Davis, 2020). Research suggests that when appraisals are conducted transparently and fairly, teachers are more likely to engage positively with professional development initiatives. Conversely, perceptions of injustice and opacity lead to dissatisfaction, disengagement, and higher attrition rates (Thompson, Larson, & Wang, 2023).

Organizational justice elements and theory highlight the role of fairness in distribution, decision-making, and interpersonal interactions (Patel & Carter, 2024). In any educational institution, it is important to ensure fairness in performance appraisals to foster job satisfaction, retain skilled teachers, and preserve a positive school environment. However, studies indicate that systemic biases and administrative relationships frequently impair the ideal objectives due to the processes involved being influenced by personal affiliations rather than objective performance measures (Martin, 2022). By addressing these challenges, it is crucial for leaders and teachers to establish a credible and effective appraisal framework and procedures in their respective schools.

Importance of Fair and Transparent Appraisals in Education

As mentioned, teachers' performance appraisal practices serve several objectives in schools, which include evaluating teachers' teaching effectiveness, providing feedback for professional development, and ensuring accountability to the teachers' standards. In theory, these appraisals should be based on objective performance criteria that reflect a teacher's contributions to student learning and the broader school environment (Smith & Johnson, 2022). However, when the systems are perceived as lacking in transparency or fairness, they fail to meet their real objectives. Lack of transparency can lead to confusion about the criteria and standards that are being used, while perceptions of unfairness can result in perceptions of injustice and demoralization among teachers (Jones & Johnson, 2021).

According to Lee (2019), transparency is a key component in maintaining trust in performance appraisal systems. Teachers provided with an understandable guideline on performance appraisals are likely to view the process involved as legitimate. The sense of legitimacy is important to foster trust between teachers and school leaders. If the guidelines are absent, teachers may view their appraisals as arbitrary or biased, thus undermining the goals intended to be achieved. Lee (2019) highlighted how the absence of transparent criteria can lead to widespread doubts, particularly when teachers do not receive adequate feedback from their leaders on how their performance aligns with schools' expectations.

Furthermore, the concept of fairness in appraisals is closely related to the idea of equity within educational institutions, which in this case refers to schools. Fair appraisals ensure that all teachers are evaluated based on consistent, objective criteria, regardless of their personal relationships with their leaders or their position in the school hierarchy (Martin, 2022). Conflicting practices in the evaluation standards can lead to systemic inequities. This occurs when some teachers are favored over others due to factors unrelated to their actual performance. This issue is common in schools where strong hierarchical cultures and personal

relationships have a significant impact on leaders' professional decisions (Patel & Carter, 2024).

Administrative Bias and Systemic Inequities

One of the most noteworthy challenges in teachers' performance appraisal is administrative bias. Biases in performance evaluations exist in various forms, which includes favouritism. Favouritism is defined as teachers receive higher ratings because of their personal relationships with school leaders rather than their actual performances (Lee, 2019). This practice is problematic and caused adverse issues towards educational settings, where subjective and holistic judgments play a vital role to determine the appraisal outcomes. For instance, teachers who are perceived as being more aligned with a leader's behaviours may receive more favourable evaluations, regardless of their actual teaching effectiveness.

Systemic inequities in teacher appraisal systems also spread beyond individual biases to broader structural issues. In many schools, especially in hierarchical systems, there are variances on how appraisal criteria are applied and practiced. For instance, new teachers may feel that they are held to different standards than the senior teachers (Martin, 2022). These inequities sabotaged the goal of fostering professional development and this can lead to widespread dissatisfaction and disengagement among teachers.

A significant outcome in systemic inequities is the deterioration of trust between teachers, school leaders and their leadership. When teachers feel that the appraisals conducted are based more on subjective opinions or favouritism than on objective measures of performance, they probably less to perceive the appraisal process as a medium for their professional growths and improvements (Patel & Carter, 2024). Instead, teachers may foresee it as a mechanism of power control or punishment. This leads to disengagement, rancour, and even indignation. This phenomenon has a direct impact and influence on the overall school climate. Teachers who feel undervalued or unfairly treated are less to contribute to the school environment (Thompson et al., 2023).

Impact on Teachers Morale

The flaws in appraisal systems and practical implementation; especially related to fairness and transparency; have a significant impact on teachers' morale. Teachers who consider their appraisals as biased or carelessly conducted by the leaders often experience frustration, demotivation, and burnout. Research by Smith and Johnson (2022) stated that any unfair or unclear conducted appraisal contributes to a lower level of job satisfaction among teachers. This will affect teachers' willingness to remain loyal in their profession and this has turned out to be the current global challenges related to educational profession.

High teacher turnover is one of the most significant result and consequences of ineffective appraisal practice and conducts. Teachers who feel unsupported and unfairly evaluated are more likely to leave their professional positions by seeking other places where they feel valued and appreciated (Williams & Davis, 2020). This turnover not only intervene the continuity of teaching. It also caused financial and administrative burdens on government, due to the need to invest more to recruit and to train new teachers.

The adverse effects of unfair appraisals are not limited to just certain teachers. They can have a broader institutional effect. Schools that fail in implementing a fair and transparent appraisal practice may struggle to attract and retain high-quality teachers, which leads to a

decline in overall school performance; academic achievements, as well as other co-curricular matters (Thompson et al., 2023). This downward slope can cause a long-term effect on the educational outcomes and the reputation of the schools.

Need for Reform

There is a clear reason to change and reform; given the significant challenges posed by the lack of fairness and transparency in the appraisal practice conducted by the leaders in schools. This study aims to understand on the positive growing research on educational equity by exploring teachers' perceptions and experiences regarding the fairness and transparency in teachers' performance appraisal practice in primary schools. Additionally, the research is exploring the influence of administrative relationships and systemic biases on the outcomes of teachers' performance appraisals conducted in primary schools. The objectives of this research are as follow:

1. To explore the perceptions and experiences of teachers regarding the fairness and transparency of the performance appraisal practice in primary schools.
2. To examine the influence of administrative relationships and systemic biases on the outcomes of teachers' performance appraisals.

By addressing these two objectives, this research is hoped to provide a nuanced or a complex understanding of how appraisal practice is really implemented in primary schools and at the same time, this research is trying to identify the gaps between policy and practice. The findings will offer a dynamic and in-depth insights of the challenges faced by teachers and leaders and at the same time it proposes strategies to improve the fairness and effectiveness of the appraisal practice.

It is well understood that the teacher' performance appraisals is essential and important to the professional development and accountability of teachers. However, when these systems are undermined by the lack of fairness and transparency, teachers may experience detrimental effects on their morale, retention, and also may provide an adverse effect on the overall school performance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In Malaysia, as in many other countries, teachers' performance appraisals in education serve as an important mechanism for improving school efficacy and advancing teacher professional standards and development. The appraisals are meant to provide accountability, stimulate professional growth, and align teaching practices with educational goals, fostering a culture of continuous teacher and educational improvement (Smith & Johnson, 2022). However, the application of the appraisal practice in Malaysia often reveals significant gaps between their intended purpose and actual practice, reflecting broader global trends within educational appraisal systems.

Teachers' Performance Appraisal in the context of Malaysian's Policy

In the local context, teachers' performance appraisal is mainly guided by *Penilaian Bersepadu Pegawai Perkhidmatan Pendidikan (PBPPP)*, which is a comprehensive framework governed by the Ministry of Education under the Malaysian Education Blueprint introduced in 2013 (Ministry of Education, 2013). This appraisal standard was designed in a 360-degree manner by integrating multiple dimensions of teachers' professional development, which includes

professionalism, instructional competence, as well as leadership potential. Despite such a structured design, the implementation of the appraisal at the school level is still inconsistent and often influenced by multiple subjectivities (Adams, D., Moosa, V., Shareefa, M., Mohamed, A., & Tan, K. L., 2024).

In addition, the Malaysian Educational Quality Standard 2.0 (SKPMg2), in Standard 4, focuses on the appraisal indicators in improving the quality of teaching and learning in schools. However, multiple case studies noted that there is a lack of fidelity in its execution, resulting in superficial compliance and limited developmental impact (Nor Azuanee Mukhtar & Mohd Asri Mohd Noor, 2024). The discrepancies between the policy and realities show the systemic inequities and weaknesses in the procedures which affect some perceptions from teachers in fairness, motivation, and trust in the institution.

The Importance of Fairness and Transparency

Fairness and transparency are the keys to the effectiveness of teachers' performance appraisals. These qualities and elements will affect teachers' level of acceptance and satisfaction with the appraisals conducted. It impacts teachers' overall job performance and loyalty (Jones et al., 2021). In the Malaysian context, where educational policies are often adapted from a variety of foreign appraisal frameworks, ensuring fairness and transparency in appraisals is important to maintain teachers' morale and institutional integrity. Multiple studies suggest that when teachers perceive the appraisal process as transparent and equitable, their job satisfaction and commitment to school goals will significantly increase (Williams & Davis, 2020).

However, it is very unfortunate to learn that despite the critical role of the qualities highlighted, discrepancies still frequently arise between policy objectives and practical implementations. In many local schools, teachers claim that there is misconduct and misalignment between the official guidelines and the real practices of the appraisals conducted by their leaders. This leads to feelings of injustice and disillusionment among the school community (Martin, 2022). These contradictions not only undermine the appraisals' credibility but also affect teachers' professional engagement and developmental trajectories.

Administrative Relationships and Systemic Bias

The impact of administrative relationships on performance appraisals' outcomes is a widespread problem and issue that is particularly pronounced in the domestic or local context. Leaders' favoritism and personal biases can significantly distort and disturb the appraisal outcomes, affecting the career progress of any teacher because it is based on subjective criteria rather than merit (Lee, 2019). In Malaysia, where interpersonal relationships often play a crucial or significant role in leaders' decisions, these biases can be more impactful. It potentially leads to systemic inequities within the school's ecosystem.

Systemic biases related to ethnicity, gender, or educational philosophy can further complicate the fairness of the appraisals conducted by all school leaders. These biases are not just a reflection of leaders' personal prejudices but are often embedded within the broader educational policies and practices, which give disadvantages to certain groups of teachers, thus perpetuating inequality (Patel & Carter, 2024).

Impact of Flawed Appraisals in Malaysia

In the Malaysian educational environment, the impact of flawed appraisals has spread beyond the immediate repercussions on teachers individually by affecting a broader and wider institutional fabric and student outcomes. The critical role of teachers' performance appraisals is to recognize teachers' capacity by motivating them and guiding their professional development. This will ensure that the educational quality is at a high standard. However, when these elements are not implemented effectively or equitably, the consequences can be far from reach. A study by Thompson et al. (2023) highlighted the effect of teachers' dissatisfaction with the appraisal processes, which can lead to reduced motivation.

Increased Teacher Turnover: Teachers who experience unfair treatment and feel undervalued are more likely to leave their positions and seek a more supportive environment. This turnover not only disrupts the educational continuity for students but also causes an additional strain on the system to recruit and train new teachers, which can be a costly and time-consuming process for the school and the Ministry of Education (Smith & Johnson, 2022).

Students' Performance: The effectiveness of any teacher is directly correlated with students' academic achievement. Teacher performance appraisals that fail to accurately evaluate teachers' performance or provide constructive feedback inhibit teachers' ability to improve and innovate in their teaching practices. Consequently, student learning suffers when teachers are not supported or appropriately challenged through these elements (Martin, 2022).

Reputational Damage: Schools and, by extension, educational district offices that are known for poor appraisal practices may struggle to attract high-quality teachers. This can create a cycle where schools become less competitive academically, further deterring skilled teachers and diminishing the educational standards across the region. The persistent issues identified in the Malaysian appraisal practice require targeted reforms aimed at enhancing both the efficacy and fairness of these processes. Given the unique cultural and administrative landscape of Malaysia, these reforms must be contextually adapted to address specific systemic inequities and operational inefficiencies.

Developing a standardized criterion for teachers' performance appraisals that are clear, transparent and well-communicated can help to reduce the subjectivity and bias in the practice and implementation. It includes a clear, measurable performance indicator that align with national educational goals set by the ministry and local school objectives in providing a fair basis to evaluate teachers in schools (Patel & Carter, 2024). School leaders and those who are involved in the appraisal processes should receive ongoing training focused on equitable evaluation practices. This training should include strategies to mitigate unaware biases and emphasize the importance of constructive feedback provided by the leaders to the teachers. By enhancing the competency and sensitivity on the appraisers, the appraisal process can become a more effective tool for professional development of the teachers in schools.

Adding to this, dynamic feedback mechanisms and teachers' involvement need to be implemented by having robust feedback systems where teachers can receive and discuss their evaluations forthrightly. This practice can help to improve the appraisal practice's transparency and effectiveness. Moreover, involving teachers in the development and continuous reviews and feedback of appraisal evaluation can ensure the processes more attuned to their needs and concerns by fostering a sense of ownership and acceptance (Williams & Davis, 2020).

Policy reforms and regulatory oversight also require regular audits of appraisal practices and outcomes. This helps maintain a high-quality standard and accountability. Regulatory oversight ensures that schools adhere to the standard guidelines provided by the

Ministry of Education, promoting consistency across the educational system at the domestic or school level. By addressing these key areas through thoughtful reforms, schools and their communities can enhance the integrity and effectiveness of their teacher appraisal practices. Such improvements are essential not only for the professional well-being of teachers but also for the overall quality and equity of education provided to Malaysian students.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study research design by utilizing thematic analysis from Braun & Clarke. It aimed to explore the structural flaws and systemic inequities in teachers' performance appraisal practices in Malaysian primary schools. This case study approach was chosen to provide an in-depth examination on teachers' lived experiences in a specific educational context, which is schools. This design enables a rich, contextualized understanding of the fairness, transparency, and administrative influences shaping teachers' performance appraisal final outcomes.

A case study is suitable to capture a complex social phenomenon within natural settings (Yin, 2018). This allows for a detailed exploration of teachers' views and perspectives on the appraisal process, offering multiple insights that quantitative methods may overlook (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This approach was chosen for its flexibility to identify some patterns, themes, and relationships within qualitative data, making it well-suited for investigating the nuanced experiences of the teachers.

Participants

Three participants were selected purposively based on a range of teaching tenures or service duration to get a diverse teachers' perspectives. The three teachers had provided a comprehensive response in understanding on the appraisal practice's which has huge impact across different teachers' career stages. This sampling strategy allowed for the collection of rich, detailed data. This is important for any qualitative research (Palinkas et al., 2015). The selection of the number of teachers was grounded on the principles of case study orientation and thematic saturation. The nature of a qualitative research is prioritizing on the depth and breadth of the contextual insights provided by its participants, and the participants of this study was purposely selected based on their distinction range of experiences in schools. This selection will provide a strategic variation and dynamism relative to enhance the conceptual depth of the analysis conducted.

The focused study achieved its saturation by the third interview, with no new themes emerging after that. In a qualitative study with focused objectives and homogeneous participants, meaningful thematic saturation can be reached between three to six interviews (Hennink, M. & Kaiser, B.N., 2022). The sample size of these three participants is methodologically and analytically sufficient in answering the research question, and at the same time, it maintains the integrity and depth of this qualitative inquiry.

- Participant B: Male, 30 years of teaching experience, providing ongoing perspectives on policy and practice transitions and the practical implications of appraisal practice.
- Participant A: Male, 18 years of teaching experience, offering a deep understanding of the evolution and consistencies in appraisal practices over nearly two decades.

- Participant C: Female, 8 years of teaching experience, representing the viewpoints of relatively newer teachers facing the challenges of current educational reforms.

All identifying information was omitted to protect the participants' confidentiality based on the ethical guidelines in qualitative research (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2018).

Table 1: Participants of the research

Participant ID	Gender	Years of Experience
Participant A	Male	30
Participant B	Male	18
Participant C	Female	8

Data Collection

The data were gathered using semi-structured interviews, allowing a flexible yet systematic exploration of the focused topic of discussion (Patton, 2015). The interviews were conducted in two ways: online and face-to-face, based on the accessibility and convenience of the teachers as participants. All interview sessions lasted approximately 60 to 80 minutes each and were recorded with the participants' prior consent. The interview guide was designed to investigate four key areas:

1. Teachers' personal experiences and overall satisfaction with the appraisal processes conducted in their respective schools.
2. Teachers' perceptions of the transparency and fairness of the appraisal practice.
3. The impact of the role played by the school leaders' relationships in shaping appraisal outcomes.
4. Suggestions to improve the fairness and effectiveness of appraisal practice.

This structured procedure ensured that the research objectives were comprehensively addressed while allowing the three participants to discuss topics freely, facilitating richness in data collection.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was adopted by following the step-by-step approach detailed by the study conducted by Braun and Clarke (2006):

1. Familiarization: The data from the interviews were transcribed. The transcripts were read multiple times to ensure familiarity with the transcriptions.
2. Building the Initial Codes: The transcripts were coded manually by identifying features of the data relevant to the research questions.
3. Determining Themes: The themes were grouped into potential and possible themes that captured significant aspects of the transcribed data.
4. Relook into the Themes: Themes were refined and reviewed by the researcher to ensure they represented the data accurately, eliminating any overlapping themes where necessary.

5. Defining Themes: Each theme was defined and linked back to the research questions. This contributed to a coherent narrative for the report process.

A second coder was involved during the process of data analysis to ensure inter-coder reliability, minimizing any potential for bias in the interpretation of the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical consensus and agreements were obtained from the Ministry of Education through the online system called Eras2.0. As for all participants, they were provided with detailed information about this research. They were affirmed of their rights to withdraw at any time without consequence. Data were securely stored, with access limited to this research team's members, and will be destroyed following the completion of the study as per ethical guidelines (Miles et al., 2018).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Through in-depth interviews with three participants, several systemic issues affecting the appraisal practice were discovered. The thematic analysis conducted identified four key themes: administrative bias, lack of transparency, impact on teacher morale, and the need for systemic reforms.

Table 2: Thematic findings

Theme	Excerpt from Participant A	Excerpt from Participant B	Excerpt from Participant C
Administrative Bias	"Bias towards certain groups is easier with the current system."	"Evaluating nearly 100 subordinates fairly is challenging."	"Bias and emotional responses impact appraisal outcomes."
Lack of Transparency	"No real process in assessments, making it less transparent."	"Lack of detailed explanations on evaluation limits."	"Feedback and marks are not received unless checked personally."
Impact on Teachers' Morale & motivation	"Appraisal system does not reflect actual performance, causing frustration."	"Opaque and unjust appraisal processes lead to demotivation."	"Lack of clarity and favouritism demotivate teachers."
Need for Reforms	"Reforms should make appraisals more inclusive and reflective."	"Standardization could reduce biases."	"Transparent criteria and consistent processes are needed."

1. Theme 1: Administrative Bias and Favouritism. Administrative bias and favouritism surfaced as key issues influencing appraisal practice's outcomes. Participant A noted that the current system appears to favor certain groups, leading to biased appraisal results. Participant B highlighted the challenges in evaluating a large number of teachers fairly, often resulting in generalized and unfair evaluation. This aligns with Lee's (2019) findings, which revealed that personal biases and leaders' favouritism sabotage the credibility of performance appraisals, negatively impacting teachers' morale and professional development.
2. Theme 2: Second theme found was 'lack of transparency'. All participants reported a rise in lack of transparency in the appraisal process. Participant C expressed the frustration due to the absence and missing of clear guidelines regarding how evaluations

were conducted, or decisions were made, which led to the perceptions of unfairness. The findings echo Martin's (2022) argument that transparent criteria are significant to ensure fairness in the appraisal process conducted. When transparency is lacking or missing, trust in the system will diminish. This will lead to disengagement and dissatisfaction among teachers.

3. Theme 3: Impact on teacher's morale and motivation. The lack of transparency elements and administrative bias had a significant effect on teacher's morale and motivation. Participant A expressed his demotivation due to the opacity or vagueness of the appraisal practice. He felt that he received an inaccurate reflection of his efforts or performance. While Participant B noted that the lack of recognition in the appraisal process led to significant frustration and his reduced motivation. These two observations are consistent with Thompson et al. (2023) who reported that discrepancies in appraisal systems contribute to reduced teacher motivation. This can affect student outcomes and institutional success adversely.
4. Theme 4: The need for a systemic reform. The three participants strongly stated that there is a need for a systemic reform in teachers' performance appraisal practice implementations. Participant B suggested that the standardization across the appraisals' evaluation can help to reduce personal biases occurred and at the same time it will help to improve objectivity of the whole implementation. Participant C is in favour for the implementation of transparent criteria and consistent processes to restore fairness to the system. The recommendations are aligned with the arguments raised previously by Patel and Carter (2024) which called for inclusive and equitable appraisal practices to address unconscious biases and structural disadvantages.

The results were focusing on the complex and dynamic issues in the teachers' performance appraisal practiced and implemented in Malaysian local schools. The identified themes proposed a clear and significant disagreement between the policy objectives and their practical execution of the appraisals' evaluation led by the school leaders. This disconnection not only undermines the integrity of appraisal and at the same time it also affects teachers' satisfaction and professional retention.

Moreover, as discussed by Patel and Carter (2024), adopting more inclusive appraisal practices could address these systemic biases and enhance fairness. The influence of administrative relationships in shaping appraisal outcomes is alarming. The findings suggested and showed that personal biases and administrative judgments are pervasive in the current practice because it leads to distorted appraisal results and had caused demotivation on teachers. There was still a need to compare and evaluate the performance of traditional forecasting approaches and machine learning techniques in this area (Thor et al., 2025).

The impact of these flaws on teachers' morale and motivation is deep and intense. As teachers' morale declines, so does their motivation. This led to the disengagement that can have a direct impact on student learning experiences and overall school performance. This ripple effect highlights the urgent need to reform and to ensure that the appraisal system is not only fair and transparent but also effective in fostering professional development and improving educational quality (Smith & Johnson, 2022). The insights from this research emphasized the need for a comprehensive reform. By addressing all the issues mentioned such as administrative bias and the need to enhance the transparency, educational leaders can ensure that appraisal systems contribute positively to the professional development and help to improve any educational outcomes.

IMPLICATIONS OF RESEARCH

The finding of this study shows important implications for educational policy, leadership training, the pursuit of equity in appraisal in Malaysian primary schools. At the policy stage, we can observe that there is an urgent need to reform the appraisal conducted to ensure the alignment between the policy objectives and the real implementation is aligned. The guidelines need to be clearer, with equity-focused evaluation tools and feedback mechanisms designed to reduce subjective bias and enhance procedural transparency (Tarigan, A., Gustamo, A. & Bangun, Y.R., 2023).

In terms of leader and leadership training, the results showed that there is a need for leadership development programs with the integration of ethical decision-making, fairness, and justice in organizations. These programs should not focus only on instructional leadership but also on equitable appraisal practices, interpersonal bias awareness, and delivery effectiveness (Culduz, 2024).

This study emphasized the inconsistent appraisal practices' effect on teachers' morale and motivation, and at the same time the trust issue in the organizational structure. Leaders need to ensure fair and transparent performance evaluations that can contribute to a more inclusive organizational school culture and improve teachers' retention. By bridging the theoretical platform with contextual evidence, this study offers practical recommendations for leaders in schools and policymakers to foster a just educational setting.

CONCLUSION

This research critically examined the structural flaws and systemic inequities within the teachers' performance appraisal process conducted in schools. By revealing the significant gaps between intended practices and actual execution or practice. The results from this research highlighted a pervasive discussion on the administrative bias, as well as a notable lack of transparency within appraisal systems, which together contribute to experience of injustice and demotivation among teachers in schools. These findings agreed with the work of Williams and Davis (2020), which emphasized on the adverse impact of a perceived unfairness on teacher satisfaction and retention. The influence of non-transparent and biased appraisals practice on teachers' morale and motivation also aligned with insights from Martin (2016), who documented on how such dynamics can affect the trust and commitment among teachers.

This research had also highlighted on the critical role that leaders as the administrative relationships played during the evaluation process, where subjective biases frequently annul objective assessment criteria (Lee, 2019). This research's insights are supported by Thompson et al. (2023), who noted that inconsistent appraisal practices could lead to significant inequities in teacher motivation, affecting overall institutional success. To address this matter, it is obligatory and mandatory that any reformations must focus on enhancing transparency and fairness in appraisal practice. Recommended strategies need to include the standardization of appraisal criteria, comprehensive training for the leaders to address the issues related to personal biases, and the development of robust feedback mechanisms to support constructive dialogue and feedback (Patel & Carter, 2024). Implementing these changes will require a steadfast commitment from educational leaders to foster an environment of equity and accountability.

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