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Faculty Evaluation Systems Shape Teaching Motivation in Chinese Tertiary Education Evidence from Henan Province

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Abstract

Faculty Evaluation System has a growing significance in determining the professional behavior and activities of university teachers in the classroom. However, existing studies on the relationship between faculty evaluation and teaching motivation have mainly concentrated on certain dimensions of evaluation separately or have been undertaken within the context of Western educational institutions, which has resulted in neglect of the complex of evaluation dimensions when exploring the influence on teaching motivation in Chinese tertiary education. This study aims at analyzing the impact of four main components of faculty evaluation system including evaluation fairness, evaluation transparency, evaluation feedback, and evaluation criteria clarity on teaching motivation of university teachers in Henan Province.

The research employs a cross-sectional quantitative approach in which 400 full-time university teachers representing various types of universities in five administrative areas of Henan Province took part and had to fill in a questionnaire including Likert-scale items related to teaching motivation that was analyzed statistically by means of IBM SPSS 26.0 through basic statistics, reliability and validity measures, Pearson correlation, and multiple linear regression.

The study finds that all four dimensions positively influence teaching motivation, with evaluation criteria clarity being the most influential ($\beta = 0.816$, $p < 0.001$), followed by evaluation fairness ($\beta = 0.076$, $p < 0.001$), evaluation transparency ($\beta = 0.066$, $p < 0.01$), and evaluation feedback ($\beta = 0.051$, $p < 0.05$). Overall, the findings indicate that these four factors account for 95.6% of teaching motivation.

This research adds to the body of knowledge by providing empirical data from the Chinese higher education system while demonstrating that teaching motivation is affected by several evaluation dimensions evaluated collectively.

1. Introduction

Ensuring higher education quality has recently become one of the main priorities for all governments and universities around the world as it corresponds to the Sustainable Development Goal 4 established by the UN. Thus, due to SDG 4, education should be of high quality, equitable, and universal as a prerequisite of sustainable development (UNESCO, 2022). Tertiary education system cannot function without university educators, who have to transmit knowledge and provide students with critical thinking, innovative ideas and professional skills (Abidogun, 2023). However, the quality of instruction does not rely only on teachers' knowledge and skills but, first of all, on their willingness to work. Teaching motivation appears to be a significant factor affecting quality of instruction as well as functioning of institutions (Watt & Richardson, 2023).

By definition, teaching motivation is the inner and outer incentives of teachers that inspire them to spend their time on improving their teaching practice. The better motivated a teacher is, the more time is spent on course preparation and the more innovative approaches are used in teaching (Lazarides et al., 2020).

At the same time, it is believed that higher motivation leads to more successful teaching methods and better results in learning (Ali et al., 2026). Conversely, lack of motivation can undermine the efficiency of teaching (Merle et al., 2022). Understanding the institutional conditions that strengthen teachers' motivation has therefore become an important issue in higher education research and practice.

Among the various institutional elements affecting teachers' motivation, faculty assessment systems have received timely scholarly attention. Faculty assessment is used to determine teachers' performance, facilitate their professional growth and make decisions about their promotion, rewards, and career progress. Besides carrying out administrative tasks, assessment systems indicate institutional expectations and shape teachers' views on how valuable their teaching work is (Baroudi et al., 2020). If assessment systems are perceived as fair, transparent, and developmental, this can stimulate the teachers to improve their teaching skills, while those systems lacking fairness, transparency, or constructive feedback can lower their self-esteem and decrease enthusiasm (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010; De Jong et al., 2022). Therefore, it is important to determine what aspects of faculty evaluation systems relate to their teaching motivation.

While current research has given crucial insights regarding faculty assessment and motivation of lecturers, important aspects are still unknown. First, the evidence so far is primarily from the Western world in education where both cultural values and institutional settings vary greatly from those of China. The extent to which such findings can be applicable to Chinese universities located in a collectivist context still remains unclear. Second, most of the previous studies have mainly investigated only some elements of faculty assessment such as whether the assessment is fair enough or whether the evaluation is transparent. It is thus unclear how these elements relate to each other in terms of motivating teachers. Finally, even though studies in the area have become more abundant in recent years — with recent work examining job satisfaction among university lecturers in Hainan Province (Su et al., 2026) — empirical studies on higher education institutions in Central China are still insufficient considering the growing importance of the region from the national perspective.

The province of Henan illustrates a valuable setting for dealing with the issues mentioned above. Henan is one of China's provinces with the most developed higher education system, and it has witnessed fast growth in higher education and a constant increase in the number of university instructors. However, it still faces challenges in the creation of a fair, transparent, and development-oriented evaluation system that considers the need for development of higher educational institutions. Given that universities in Henan differ greatly in their mission, discipline, and educational goals creating an effective evaluation system becomes crucial: improving the evaluation systems is thus regarded as an important problem of ensuring the teachers' development and motivation.

This research is based on Educational Equity Theory, Self-Determination Theory, and Expectancy Theory. Educational Equity Theory provides the idea that fair assessment methods and equal treatment enhance the teachers' perceptions of fairness and trust in the organization (Coleman, 1966; Rawls, 1971). Self-Determination Theory shows how transparent appraisal methods work, constructive feedback receives

teachers' needs of autonomy and competence at work and thus leads to higher intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Expectancy Theory argues that teachers are motivated more when they are aware of the evaluation criteria and believe that their hard work can result in high performance and rewards (Vroom, 1964). All these theories help to build the structure for understanding how various aspects of evaluation system may impact instructors' motivational level.

With reference to the above discussed theoretical perspectives and research gaps identified above, the current study focuses on examining the association between four dimensions of faculty evaluation systems (namely, fairness in evaluation, transparency in evaluation, feedback in evaluation, and clarity of evaluation criteria) and teaching motivation of university teachers in Henan Province. In this regard, the study will discuss the following four research questions which will investigate the extent to which all four evaluation dimensions positively impact teaching motivation.

This research makes three contributions regarding the existing literature. First, it extends previous studies on faculty evaluation by studying faculty evaluation systems as multidimensional instead of treating the evaluation system as a single dimension. Second, it provides empirical data from Central China universities, adding to the existing international literature on faculty evaluation and teacher motivation in non-Western higher education. Third, the results provide guidance to university leaders and policymakers in developing faculty evaluation systems that can evaluate teachers' performance as well as motivate them in their profession.

The structure of this paper is as follows. First, the literature on the topic will be reviewed and research hypotheses will be developed. Then the methodology section will outline the research design, sampling procedures, means of measurement and data processing. After that, the empirical results will be presented, analyzed and discussed. Lastly, the paper concludes with the summary of the contribution of the research and the limitation of the study and possible recommendations for future research.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Teaching Motivation

Motivation in educational practice has been acknowledged as one of the principal factors influencing the quality of teaching and the effectiveness of education in higher education. This concept indicates the psychological factors responsible for initiating, directing, and providing teachers with the willingness to put effort in their teaching activities, such as preparation of the training process, improvement of the teaching process, work with students, and their personal growth and development in their profession (Abidogun, 2023). Motivation in teaching is worth noting as a motivating factor that is developing constantly with the help of inner and outer factors and can change in value.

Past research has made a distinction between two types of motivation: intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation derives from teachers' interest in teaching, their dedication to their students' learning, and their enjoyment of their own teaching practice, while extrinsic motivation is explained by

outside rewards such as getting a promotion, salary, recognition in the profession, and rewards from schools (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Even though both types of motivation lead to teachers' professional engagement, current studies indicate that intrinsic teaching motivation is more essential for establishing lasting commitment to teaching and promoting ongoing improvement in teaching performance (Watt & Richardson, 2023). The more intrinsic teaching motivation teachers have, the more willing they are to try out new pedagogical methods, improve their teaching performance, and keep enthusiastic about their job regardless of the growing workload or external pressures.

Existing studies indicate that the motivation to teach is determined by contextual features at different levels of scale. At the individual level, the motivation of teachers depends on personal values, self-efficacy levels, years in teaching practice, and the current phase in the teacher's career (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011; Lazarides et al., 2020). At the organizational level, national culture, support from the leadership, management techniques, and evaluation systems play a vital role with respect to teaching motivation (Berhanu, 2023; Shen et al., 2021). Educational institutions that ensure a fruitful working environment and recognize success in teaching and career development are more efficient in keeping their teachers motivated. At the level of society, the recognition of the teaching profession, investments in higher education, and governmental policies regarding teaching are also significant variables influencing the teachers' motivation (UNESCO, 2022; Aytaç et al., 2024, 2022; Iqbal et al., 2023). Among the range of influences, the evaluation systems in universities are becoming the topic of numerous studies due to the fact that these systems convey the expectations of universities and create an impression of the recognition of teachers' efforts. The evaluation systems are not merely accountability tools; they can also enhance or undermine teachers' motivation depending on their design. If the evaluation is perceived by teachers as supportive and professional development-oriented, it creates a positive attitude towards teaching. If not, the situation can be totally opposite.

In spite of the expanding body of research surrounding teaching motivation, there are two key limitations. To begin, the existing literature largely views teaching motivation simply as a result of more general individual or organizational factors and there is little attention given to the specific institutional processes through which evaluation systems affect teacher motivation. Moreover, studies have looked at aspects of evaluation systems in isolation without taking into account the influence of various aspects of evaluation on teaching motivation as part of a single analytical approach. This is particularly apparent in the context of Chinese higher education because of the lack of empirical evidence especially for universities in Central China. While some research on psychological aspects of the experiences of Chinese university teachers has started to appear (Weina et al., 2026), little attention has been focused on the impact evaluation systems have on teacher motivation, particularly among universities in places such Henan Province.

Based on this empirical background, the present research defines teaching motivation as dependent variable and investigates the relationship between the teachers' motivation and four key aspects of university faculty evaluation systems (evaluation fairness, evaluation transparency, evaluation feedback and evaluation criteria clarity) in Henan Province. By focusing on these institutional aspects at the same

time, this study hopes to provide important knowledge on the ways evaluation systems can support the commitment and engagement in the teaching activities of university educators.

2.2 Evaluation Fairness and Teaching Motivation

Fairness in assessments within educational institutions is one of the key elements of an evaluation system that will operate successfully. This is because justice in assessments determines how teachers view evaluations and how encouraged they feel to involve themselves into activities related to teaching (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010). Thus, evaluation fairness helps to understand whether the criteria for evaluations are applied in a consistent manner, whether the process of evaluation is objective, and whether the results of assessment reflect what teachers actually managed to do during the instruction.

Empirical evidence suggests that fair evaluations provide teachers with a greater motivation to work (Kraft & Christian, 2022). Studies show that stable evaluations help teachers to understand what is expected from them and reduce their fears related to being treated unequally by the administration. On the contrary, evaluation methods that are used in certain disciplines or whose results mainly depend on research activities undermine teachers' perception of evaluation process and the desire to work (Hallinger et al., 2020).

The issue of evaluation fairness has also been actively studied in relation to evaluation procedures. It has been proven that transparent evaluation processes, evaluation by more than one expert, and objective review of evaluation results stimulate teachers' ideas about the usage of the procedures (Barman et al., 2022). If teachers think that evaluation has been conducted objectively and there was no undue influence on evaluations, they are more likely to think that evaluation brings them opportunities for professional growth.

Another important dimension of evaluation fairness is the issue of reliability of the evaluation results. Evaluation results help to motivate teachers, provided they really correspond to their teaching performance. Thus, Thien et al. (2023) state that teachers demonstrate higher motivation to work when they believe that their evaluation results fairly reflect what they have done during the teaching process. On the contrary, when the results of evaluation do not reflect the efforts made by teachers, they may consider evaluation as unjust (Irnidayanti et al., 2020). These findings highlight that teachers' motivation depends not only on evaluation outcomes themselves but also on whether those outcomes are perceived as credible and justifiable.

While research results in general indicate a positive impact of fairness of evaluation on teaching motivation, most of the evidence is found in Western universities. There has been a smaller number of studies on this topic in Chinese universities characterized by distinct culture, administration, and evaluation practices. Furthermore, in these studies, only separate limited elements of fairness are taken into account instead of treating fairness of evaluation as a part of a whole process of evaluation in the universities. This lack of knowledge is quite transparent in Central China as there are not many studies conducted in this field due to the continuing changes in the sphere of evaluation in higher education.

According to the theory of educational equity, equality of evaluation provides teachers with higher understanding of fairness and recognition resulting in strong commitment to the educational process. Thus, the current study states the following hypothesis. H1. Evaluation fairness has a positive and significant effect on teaching motivation among university teachers.

2.3 Evaluation Transparency and Teaching Motivation

The term ‘evaluation transparency’ describes how open teachers are about the evaluation criteria, procedures, processes, weightings, and results of their work (Baroudi et al., 2020). This transparency improves teachers’ understanding of how their teaching effectiveness is evaluated and decreases the degree of ambiguity regarding evaluation processes. Consequently, the transparency of evaluation has become an important institutional factor influencing teachers’ perceptions of the evaluation system and motivation for teaching improvement.

Research indicates that transparent evaluation systems increase teaching motivation because they clarify the expectations imposed by the institution. If the criteria for assessment and their importance are communicated clearly, teachers will be able to adjust their teaching approach in accordance with those expectations thereby knowing how to improve their work (Fan, 2022). By contrast, unclear or insufficiently conveyed evaluation criteria lead to doubts concerning performance standards, leaving teachers with no clear guidelines for teaching improvement and decreasing their motivation to teach (Akhtar & Akhtar, 2024).

Transparency contributes to raising teachers’ trust in the evaluation system. Research findings indicate that communicating the process of evaluation, the composition of the evaluators, and processes of implementation reduces the teachers’ concerns regarding subjectivity and increases the level of trust in the outcomes of evaluation (Liu & Xu, 2023). A greater level of trust in the evaluation system increases the probability that the teachers are actively engaged in improving their teaching and developing professionally (De Jong et al., 2022). On the contrary, lack of transparency makes teachers doubt the legitimacy of evaluation processes.

The communication of results and feedback also provides teachers with useful information for improving their teaching practices. When teachers know what the results of the evaluation are, they are able to identify their strengths and weaknesses and improve accordingly (Poulou et al., 2023). Communicating evaluation information correctly allows institutions to promote professional learning and encourage teachers to share their successful teaching practices. However, it is also important to point out that transparency should be achieved in a way that respects teachers’ dignity as professionals by providing feedback and would not put them under unnecessary pressure associated with the public comparison process (Baroudi et al., 2020).

Another major purpose of evaluation transparency is its importance in teachers’ participation in institutional governance. When evaluation policies and procedures are transparently communicated, teachers have more chances to understand, discuss, and provide their input about evaluation systems

continuously improved. Such participation implies greater belongingness and improved awareness of institutional evaluation practices that create conditions fostering teachers' intrinsic motivation to teach (Schott et al., 2020).

In spite of growing interest in evaluation transparency from scholars, current research have limitations in two ways. One, most studies consider evaluation transparency in isolation, paying little attention to its interrelation with other aspects of faculty evaluation systems. Two, there is a shortage of empirical data from Chinese universities, especially those from Central China. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate the issue further to understand whether evaluation transparency can have a similar effect on teachers' motivation in this concrete institutional and cultural context.

As per Self-Determination Theory, it is believed that evaluation transparency boosts teachers' feelings of autonomy due to the provision of clear information on evaluation requirements and the possibility for teachers to make reasonable educational decisions. Therefore, considering this theoretical framework and empirical data, the following hypothesis is formulated: H2. Evaluation transparency positively and significantly influences the teaching motivation of university teachers.

2.4 Evaluation Feedback and Teaching Motivation

Evaluation feedback illustrates one of the functions that faculty evaluation systems serve in terms of assisting teachers with aspects related to performance evaluation (De Jong et al., 2022). Differently from evaluation results, which are mostly descriptive in nature, effective feedback helps teachers to develop professionally through highlighting potential strengths, opportunities for improvement, and refining their teaching practice. Therefore, evaluation feedback is considered one of the critical mechanisms that facilitate the connection between evaluation systems and teachers' motivation.

Research shows that effective feedback must be timely, specific, and relevant to the instructional needs of the teacher. Timely feedback allows teachers to reflect on their teaching activities and take steps to improve before ineffective actions become habitual (Wilcoxen & Lemke, 2021). Providing feedback at a later stage diminishes its effectiveness because teachers may no longer remember in detail the teaching situations that feedback refers to (Lazarides et al., 2020). In addition to being timely, feedback must provide teachers with concrete and meaningful advice. General statements are not informative, whereas detailed advice helps teachers learn what to do in order to improve their teaching activities and feel more confident in their ability to implement needed changes (Poulou et al., 2023).

One more important principle of effective feedback is the responsiveness of feedback to teachers' professional requirements. According to Coppe et al. (2024), individualized feedback enables teachers who are at different stages of their careers to receive useful advice that takes into consideration their individual strengths and weaknesses. Moreover, Derrington and Brandon (2019) maintain that differentiated feedback is more useful for long-term development of teachers than standardized evaluation comments. Furthermore, researchers suggest that feedback should not be perceived as a one-way process. Ways of communicating with evaluators will help teachers understand feedback better,

build trust in the evaluation process, and accept the suggestions for improvement more readily (Kraft & Christian, 2022).

Although all previous studies seemed to support the beneficial effect of evaluation feedback, they mainly studied specific aspects of feedback rather than its total impact within the total faculty evaluation system. Less empirical research is available on Chinese universities, especially universities located in Central China. For this reason, more investigation is needed to understand if evaluation feedback can have a positive effect on motivation of university teachers in this area.

Based on the Self-Determination Theory (SDT), constructive evaluation feedback meets the needs of teachers for competence by contributing to professional development and improving their self-esteem in teaching. Thus, the following hypothesis can be formulated: H3. Evaluation feedback influences the motivation of university teachers positively and significantly.

2.5 Evaluation Criteria Clarity and Teaching Motivation

Evaluation criteria clarity refers to the extent to which evaluation standards are clearly defined, specific, and understandable to teachers (Zalli & Ishak, 2024). The presence of clear evaluation criteria provides clarity about the standards for performance assessment so that the teachers may use them for bringing their educational activities into correspondence with the targets set by educational institutions. Since the emphasis on accountability and quality of education is growing among the universities, clearly set evaluation standards are becoming one of the mandatory components of effective faculty evaluation systems.

According to the current research data, teachers experience higher motivation when it comes to performance evaluation if the standards are clear and measurable. Having a clear understanding of evaluation criteria allows teachers to know what effective teaching means and where to focus their efforts for improvement (Zalli & Ishak, 2024). On the other hand, unclear or ambiguous standards create difficulties in terms of clarifying the evaluation criteria and understanding what should be done to promote quality teaching (Zalli & Ishak, 2024). The absence of clarity may negatively influence teachers' confidence in the evaluation system as well as their motivation to put in extra efforts while teaching.

In addition, research literature tends to emphasize the importance of clear and operational definitions of evaluation standards. Hua et al. (2022) argued that having clear evaluation criteria leads to observable performance indicators that help improve teachers' instruction efficacy while reducing evaluators' inconsistencies. Similar to that, scientific and comprehensive evaluation methods enhance the credibility of evaluation outcomes due to the use of multiple sources of information rather than relying on a single criterion (Kraft & Christian, 2022).

Moreover, the assessment criteria must be based on the goals of the institutions and the characteristics of the discipline. Due to the fact that different institutes of higher education focus on various educational goals, the assessment criteria must be fairly flexible for accommodating the discipline diversity while preserving the required consistency (O'Meara, 2021). The alignment of their requirements with what

universities expect from teachers allows them to make a more accurate connection between the requirements of the educational institution and their own activities; thus, it would help them to maintain their motivation for teaching.

Though the number of studies devoted to the clarity of evaluation criteria is increasing, the majority of studies are focused solely on one particular aspect of evaluation systems. Available evidence in the field of higher education in China is also scarce, and this indicates that the need for more clarification of the problem exists.

The theory of expectancy proposes that a person will work hard if these expectations are clearly defined and one believes that his/her efforts will lead to desirable results. Thus, the following hypothesis is suggested: H4. Clarity of evaluation criteria positively influences teaching motivation of university educators.

2.6 Theoretical Foundation

The research incorporates the Educational Equity Theory, the Self-Determination Theory, and the Expectancy Theory to develop an understanding of the role of faculty evaluation systems in impacting instructional motivation of teachers. Proponents of Educational Equity Theory believe that a just evaluation approach is instrumental in shaping teachers' sense of justice, authority, and esteem from the organization (Coleman, 1966; Rawls, 1971). Self-Determination Theory posits that teacher motivation can only be achieved if teachers' needs for independence, competence, and affiliation are met (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000). With regards to faculty evaluation systems, it can be assumed that transparency contributes to the realization of teacher independence, feedback is necessary for the improvement in teacher competence, and the evaluation process aims at providing a sense of belonging to teachers (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011). The Expectancy Theory states that the motivation of teachers will increase provided that the performance standards are clearly formulated and teachers are sure of the positive impact of their hard work (Vroom, 1964; Porter & Lawler, 1968).

2.7 Conceptual Framework

Based on prior literature and theory, the study proposes a conceptual framework which includes evaluation fairness, evaluation transparency, evaluation feedback, and evaluation criteria clarity as the four independent variables affecting teaching motivation. The framework posits that each element of evaluation has a positive role in increasing teachers' instructional motivation through different yet related theoretical ways. Using this framework, the study examines the relationship among university teachers in Henan Province.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The present study used a quantitative cross-sectional research approach to investigate the links between faculty evaluation systems and teaching motivation of university faculty members in Henan Province, China. A cross-sectional design fits the purpose of exploring the connections between some independent and dependent variables in a particular time frame, thus being widely adopted in educational management research to measure various organizational and psychological phenomenon (Creswell, 2019; Sekaran & Bougie, 2021). The goal of this project being that of studying the predictive role of the above-mentioned variables rather than the causative ones, a survey based on questionnaires was chosen as an appropriate tool to conduct this research.

3.2 Participants and Sampling

The target demographic in this study consisted of in-service university teachers employed in comprehensive, science and engineering, normal, and vocational universities across Henan Province. According to statistics released by the Henan Provincial Department of Education (2025), approximately 80,000 full-time teachers were employed in higher education institutions throughout the province.

To enhance sample representativeness, proportionate stratified sampling was adopted based on university type, geographical region, and academic rank. Following the sampling guidelines proposed by Krejcie and Morgan (1970), a target sample of 400 teachers was established, exceeding the minimum sample size required for large populations. This sampling strategy ensured adequate representation of teachers from different institutional contexts while providing sufficient statistical power for subsequent regression analyses.

3.3 Measures

The data were collected with the help of a structured questionnaire which comprised six sections and a total of thirty items. Responses to all construct items were gathered using a five-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The questionnaire contained information about demographics and included measures of the four independent variables and one dependent variable.

The measure of evaluation fairness was obtained from the scale developed by Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2010) which assesses the perceptions of teachers regarding the coherence of evaluation standards, procedural justice, and the objectivity of evaluation results. The evaluation measure of transparency was made use of Baroudi et al.'s (2020) instrument that measure the clarity of criteria used in evaluation, the evaluation processes, the criteria for scoring and evaluation results. The measure of evaluation feedback was adapted from De Jong et al. (2022) measuring the timely provision of feedback along with the relevance and the utility of evaluation feedback. The measure of clarity of evaluation criteria was borrowed from Hallinger et al. (2020) that measures teachers' views on the clarity, specificity, and relevance of evaluation standards. Teaching motivation, as the dependent variable, was measured by the Teaching Motivation Scale developed by Abidogun (2023) which assesses teachers' enthusiasm for teaching, commitment to their profession, efforts they put in their teaching process, and readiness to improve their teaching performance.

To ensure contextual appropriateness, all questionnaire items were adapted to reflect the institutional characteristics of higher education in Henan Province while preserving the conceptual meaning of the original scales.

3.4 Data Collection

Researchers used an online questionnaire distributed through Google Forms for data collection. The researchers first obtained the approval of the appropriate university administrative departments to allow the questionnaire to be distributed through official channels including faculty working groups and teaching communities. It is important to note that a preface prepared for the participants presented the objectives of the study, voluntary participation, issues of anonymity, and how the gathered data will be used.

The questionnaire was available for four weeks. Further, during the second and third weeks the researchers sent reminders in order to raise the response rate. After conducting the survey, researchers excluded from the analysis incomplete questionnaires, questionnaires that did not show a proper trend, and questionnaires that were filled out in a short time in order to maintain high quality of the required data during the quantitative analysis phase.

3.5 Data Analysis

The statistical analyses were performed applying IBM SPSS Statistics Software version 26.0. Initially, the descriptive statistics, which summarize the characteristics of the respondents and the distribution of study variables, were computed.

To analyze the reliability of the constructs, the Cronbach's alpha coefficients were utilized, and exploratory factor-analysis was conducted to check validity of the constructs. Afterward, Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to investigate the relationship of evaluation fairness, evaluation transparency, evaluation feedback, and evaluation criteria clarity with teaching motivation. Finally, multiple linear regressions were used to evaluate the influence of the four evaluation factors on teaching motivation and to verify the proposed hypotheses. The independent-samples t-test and the one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) were also performed to find out whether there are any differences between the demographic groups, if necessary.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

The research adhered to established ethical principles for education research (American Educational Research Association [AERA], 2011). Participants were included in the study on the basis of their expressed willingness, and their consent was received before answering the questionnaire. The survey did not ask that respondents provide any information that could lead to their identification, and participants gave their responses anonymously. The information was used in an exclusively academic manner and was stored securely to maintain the confidentiality of the participants.

4. Data Analysis

4.1 Respondent Characteristics

The final analysis incorporated 400 questionnaires. Those who completed the survey were employed at universities throughout Henan Province and had varied teaching experience, rank, university type, discipline, and education level. As presented in Table 1, the teaching experts having fewer than six years of work constituted 70.3% of the sample, whereas participants with rank of junior lecturers and associated professor made 75.0% of the total. These respondents were working at comprehensive universities, universities of science and technology, pedagogical universities, and institutes of vocational education, which meant that different types of institutions were represented.

Table 1
Demographic characteristics of respondents (N = 400)

Variable	Category	n	%
Teaching experience	< 3 years	146	36.5
	3–5 years	135	33.8
	6–10 years	85	21.3
	11–20 years	23	5.8
	> 20 years	11	2.8
Professional title	Junior	177	44.3
	Intermediate	123	30.8
	Associate professor	80	20.0
	Professor	20	5.0
University type	Comprehensive	160	40.0
	Science & Engineering	120	30.0
	Normal	80	20.0
	Vocational	40	10.0

4.2 Descriptive Statistics, Reliability, and Validity

The reliability and descriptive statistics are shown in Table 2. The average mean values of all constructs were more than half of the five-point scale, which indicates that the faculty evaluation system was perceived quite positively and motivation was relatively high. Evaluation feedback scored the highest (M = 4.19, SD = 0.91), evaluation criteria clarity was in second place with (M = 4.10, SD = 0.88), evaluation transparency was third (M = 3.90, SD = 0.79), and evaluation fairness was last (M = 3.72, SD = 0.77). Teaching motivation was rated relatively high as well (M = 4.10, SD = 0.87).

The Cronbach alpha coefficients ranged from .835 to .913, which is higher than the minimal level of .70, which shows sufficient internal consistency of the instruments. The KMO value was .902 and Barletts test of sphericity was significant ($\chi^2 = 12374.107$, df = 300, $p < .001$), which indicates suitability in terms of conducting factor analysis.

Table 2
Descriptive statistics and reliability

Construct	Mean	SD	Cronbach's α
Evaluation Fairness	3.722	0.770	0.836
Evaluation Transparency	3.896	0.790	0.835
Evaluation Feedback	4.187	0.909	0.913
Evaluation Criteria Clarity	4.100	0.879	0.890
Teaching Motivation	4.101	0.875	0.887
Note: KMO = .902; Bartlett's $\chi^2 = 12374.107$, $p < .001$.			

4.3 Correlation Analysis

Table 3 presents the Pearson's correlation coefficients. All four components of faculty assessment correlation have a positive statistically significant relationship to the teaching motivation (p <. 001). The strongest link was observed between the clarity of the assessment criteria and the teaching motivation being equal to .974, then evaluation of feedback was .856, while the evaluation of transparency and fairness were .839 and .820. The correlations between independent variables were within the range of .759 and .848, which indicates a moderate relationship.

Table 3
Correlations among study variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. Evaluation Fairness	1				
2. Evaluation Transparency	.776**	1			
3. Evaluation Feedback	.759**	.848**	1		
4. Evaluation Criteria Clarity	.802**	.822**	.848**	1	
5. Teaching Motivation	.820**	.839**	.856**	.974**	1
Note. p < .01.					

4.4 Multiple Regression Analysis

To understand the influence of the four dimensions of evaluation on teaching motivation, multiple regression analysis was used. Table 4 presents that the regression model yielded significant results (F =

2163.856, p < .001) and explained 95.6% of the variance in teaching motivation.

Table 4
Multiple regression results predicting teaching motivation

Predictor	β	t	p	Hypothesis
Evaluation Fairness	.076	4.045	< .001	H1 Supported
Evaluation Transparency	.066	2.971	.003	H2 Supported
Evaluation Feedback	.051	2.239	.026	H3 Supported
Evaluation Criteria Clarity	.816	35.592	< .001	H4 Supported

According to the results of the prediction analysis, evaluation criteria clarity was found to be the strongest predictor of teaching motivation (β = .816, p < .001). Evaluation fairness (β = .076, p < .001), evaluation transparency (β = .066, p = .003), and evaluation feedback (β = .051, p = .026) proved to have significant positive impacts, which confirmed the hypotheses from H1 to H4. Model statistics: R = .978; R^2 = .956; Adjusted R^2 = .956; F = 2163.856; p < .001.

5. Results and Discussion

The research results reveal that all four aspects of the teacher evaluation system serve as positive and meaningful antecedents for teaching motivation of teachers; thus, the tested hypotheses are supported. Out of all the predictors, evaluation criteria clarity proved to be the most significant in determining teachers' motivation levels, followed by evaluation fairness, evaluation transparency, and evaluation feedback.

The dominant role of evaluation criteria clarity suggests that clear criteria reduce the unpredictability of expectations and give teachers greater orientation in their practice. This conclusion is in line with Expectancy Theory as it claims that people are more encouraged when expectations and criteria for evaluation are clear. In this respect, clear evaluation criteria help teachers adjust their teaching practices according to the demands of their institutions.

Evaluation fairness had a significant positive effect and supported Equity Theory principles. When educators find evaluation procedures and outcomes to be fair, they build trust in institutional leadership and maintain positive attitude towards their work. This fact may decrease dissatisfaction caused by the evaluation process and enhance commitment to teaching. Likewise, transparency of evaluation positively impacts motivation to teach. Transparent evaluation procedures do help teachers understand the process in decision making, they exceed uncertainty and increase procedural justice satisfaction. This trend correlates with the findings of previous studies which indicate the impact of transparency in institutional practices on the level of organizational trust and dedication to profession of the teachers.

Evaluation feedback also showed a significant positive relationship with teaching motivation, although its standardized effect was comparatively smaller. Constructive feedback provides teachers with opportunities to recognize strengths, identify areas for improvement, and regulate their professional development. Continuous feedback therefore serves not only as an assessment mechanism but also as an important source of emotional and professional support.

Overall, these findings suggest that teacher evaluation systems function not merely as accountability mechanisms but also as institutional resources that influence teachers' psychological well-being. In particular, designing evaluation systems characterized by clear standards, fairness, transparency, and developmental feedback may contribute to stronger emotional regulation among university teachers, thereby supporting sustainable teaching quality within higher education institutions.

6. Conclusion

The research carried out in this study analyzed the interconnections among four aspects of the performance evaluation system of teachers, i.e. fairness of the evaluation, transparency of the evaluation, feedback of the evaluated individual, evaluation criteria clarity and the teachers' motivation to teach in a university context of Henan Province, China.

The outcomes indicate that all four parameters positively and statistically significantly affect teaching motivation, where evaluation criteria clarity appears to be the most important one. Thus, this paper contributes the empirical evidence in favor of the suggestion that designing an effective evaluation system is more than just providing an assessment of performance.

The study also contributes to the literature by bringing together different facets of teacher evaluation into one analytic model, validating the complementary roles they can play in the emotional regulation of teachers. In practical terms, it is important that higher education institutions make efforts to create evaluation systems that are transparent, equitable, and clearly understood, as well as provide timely feedback aimed at teacher development.

7. Limitations and Future Research

There are some limitations to consider when interpreting the results of this study.

Firstly, this study used a cross-sectional research design, which means that it is impossible to identify causal relations between the variables. Even if some significant relationships were established, a longitudinal or experimental study would yield more convincing evidence concerning the causal effects of the teacher evaluation system on emotional regulation.

Secondly, the research relied on self-report questionnaires. The methodology used standardized measuring instruments with good reliability and validity. Still, self-reports may suffer from the common method variance and social desirability bias. Therefore, future research should aim at gathering data

from other sources like peer evaluations, supervisor judgments, class room observations, performance of the institution, etc to enhance measurement of the validity.

Thirdly, the sample in this research was limited only to university teachers from Henan Province. The institutional culture, evaluation policies and the educational environment may vary from region to region and from country to country affecting the generalizability of the results obtained. Future studies should involve more geographical diversity and conduct cross-regional or cross-national studies to see whether the established relationships still hold true.

Finally, the present study (2021) solely addressed the direct impact of four evaluation dimensions on teaching motivation. Other potentially important organizational and psychological variables such as organizational support, leadership style, job satisfaction, teachers' self-efficacy, organizational commitment, work engagement were not included into the research model.

Declarations

Ethics approval and consent to participate:

The study protocol and questionnaire administration procedures were reviewed and authorised through the participating institutions' research-approval processes prior to recruitment. The participating university administrations approved the protocol and questionnaire distribution, and departmental coordinators approved the timing and logistical arrangements for data collection. The study protocol was formally reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board of Zhengzhou University, China (Approval No. ZZUIRB2025-078). The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the Institutional Review Board of Zhengzhou University and the Declaration of Helsinki. Written informed consent was obtained from all participating university teachers before data collection. Participation was entirely voluntary, and participants were informed that they could decline to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without adverse consequences or impact on their professional standing.

Consent for publication:

Not applicable. This study involved anonymous questionnaire-based data collection from university teachers, and no identifiable personal data, images, audio, or video recordings were obtained from any participant. Therefore, consent for publication of individual participant data is not applicable.

Clinical trial number:

Not applicable.

Competing interests:

The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

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Author Contribution

Li Yaxin and Khalid Ahmed conceptualised the study and designed the methodology. Li Yaxin and Tursunova Dilfuza Shavkatovna performed the data collection and managed the survey administration across participating universities in Henan Province. Ruqia Saba Ashraf and Niaz Ali conducted the statistical analysis, interpreted the results, and contributed to data validation. Muhammad Haroon Rasheed contributed to the theoretical framework, literature review, and manuscript editing. Li Yaxin drafted the original manuscript. Khalid Ahmed supervised the research process, provided critical revisions, and serves as the corresponding author. All authors reviewed, approved, and take responsibility for the final version of the manuscript.

Data Availability

The anonymised dataset generated and analysed during this study is not publicly available to protect participant confidentiality and in accordance with the terms of the institutional ethics approval. De-identified data, the item codebook, and supporting analysis records may be available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request, subject to permission from the participating institutions and applicable ethical requirements.

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