

Complying with Neoliberal Performative Techniques in Chinese Education

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Abstract: In this period where performance management has gotten to an abolishing degree of teacher quality and school viability; educational institutes, students and teachers are presently under pressure to compete for acknowledgment on the premise of evaluations, yearly audits, and ranking of tables: where teachers are now positioned as self-governing professionals with their work progressively measured against students' performance on national and international tests. And teachers who are 'ethical subjects' find their values have been tested by what Stephen Ball called 'the terrors of performativity'. Further, the value placed on measuring, politicizing, and labeling teachers has caused emotional stress in transforming what it's meant to be a teacher. The literature review results were based on one research question: Why do teachers still comply with neoliberal performative techniques? The literature search was based on the following primary keywords such as "teacher performativity," "teacher + neoliberalism", and "teacher + performance management". The paper unravels that teachers are still complying with neoliberal performative techniques because it provides a stage to gain joy and social acknowledgment, which worked as a psychical motivating force persuading them to utilize them for their academic advantages.

Keywords: Education reform, Performance Management, Performative Techniques, Neoliberalism, China

I. INTRODUCTION

Performance management is a set of organizational practices, procedures, and design elements that are used to motivate and support workers to get the intended results (Huang & Xu, 2020). It allows management to better evaluate employee job performance against company guidelines, make better job assignment decisions, and determine their employees' training and development needs (Benedikt, 2014). The primary goal of performance management is to create a high-performance culture in which people and groups accept responsibility for the continuous enhancement of the organization's processes as well as their skills and ability to contribute within a framework provided by effective leadership (Armstrong, 2006).

According to Liu and Liu (2016), Chinese municipal governments were enthusiastic about the implementation of a performance management system since the early 1990s, later various performance management efforts were introduced across China's provinces and cities in the late 1990s. They posited that the State Council passed "The Program for Comprehensively Promoting Administration by Law", stating that it will proactively examine performance management systems in 2004. For the first time in the following year, the State Council offered "performance management" and a

"complete evaluation process" for socio-economic development in its official paper "Key Working Points of 2005". Huang and Xu (2020) suggest that the implementation of performance management in the Chinese education system is a combination of Western influences and Chinese traditions; integrating state-led initiatives, policies, or decisions with performance management instruments. In particular, the bureaucratic power of the Chinese government continues to play an important role in the process of creating performance targets, norms, and incentives.

As a result of the implementation of a performance management system in Chinese education, the new teacher performance evaluation system "performance by pay" which was introduced in 2009 has become the new method of assessing teachers' performance. Before the new teacher performance evaluation system was the "traditional teacher evaluation" which put too much emphasis on spoon-feeding information to students and lasted from 1970 to 2001, and the "contemporary teacher evaluation" which placed a premium on teacher diversity and encouraging greater student participation in the learning process, started from 2001 to 2009. In the 2009 reform "performance by pay", teachers in compulsory education are waged based on their levels of performance (Liu & Zhao, 2013). Performance pay is a method by which organizations evaluate individual performance and personal values and provide compensation modifications at their own discretion. It is a system of paying workers based on their output in the workplace. (Huang, 2010). By linking teachers' pay to a measurement of job success, like student test-score growth, performance pay schemes aim to motivate teachers' effort, increase student accomplishment, and recruit and retain good teachers (Chang et al., 2021). It can increase productivity and performance by motivating workers and fostering a culture of accountability.

Through performance by pay, data-driven practices and rationales have come to remake the potentials by which the teaching and teachers can be known and esteemed and how teachers can eventually be and relate to themselves with their work. Any difference of opinion between the teaching and the data will be settled within the support of data, particularly when such data possess objective fairness and certainty of numbers (Lewis & Holloway, 2018). Singh (2018) posited that performative techniques which are a result of performance by pay have brought about the pressures teachers and school leaders have to endure because of performance targets that regulate the teachers' professional conduct. Teachers are now

positioned as self-governing professionals with their work progressively measured against students' performance on national and international tests (Singh, 2018). Literature shows there are negative effects of performative techniques (performance management policies) on teachers, in that it changes who teachers are as professionals (Ball, 2000, 2003; Holloway & Brass, 2017; Lewis & Holloway, 2018). But countries, schools, and school leaders continue to implement performance management policies. This reviewed article aimed to determine the factors influencing Chinese senior high school teachers to comply with neoliberal performatives techniques (performance management policies), and propose some rebalancing recommendations based on the review.

II. METHODOLOGY

This article represents the literature review results based on the research question: Why do teachers comply with neoliberal performative techniques? The purpose of a literature review is to discover research strategies and identify the data collection approaches that have not been productive (Mills & Gay, 2019). The literature review search was done based on the following primary keywords: "teacher performativity," "teacher + neoliberalism" and "teacher+ performance management". The research database used in the search is within the scope of education, social science, Education Resource Information Centre (ERIC), Web of Science (Education and Educational Research category), PubMed, ISI, and Google Scholar.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Educational Reform: The shift from Welfare to Market Values

Over the years, teachers' education in many countries has become a significant area of government policy (Furlong, 2013). The pursuit of neoliberal policies necessitates the critical factor of this change. Since the 1970s, neoliberalism has been in different parts of the world, and many authors have suggested that neoliberalism helps shape the world (Furlong, 2013). Neoliberalism is not static; its interpretation varies in different countries and changes over time due to political processes. Neoliberalism lumped so many things together to merit a single identity (Thorpe & Rinehart, 2013). Saas-Failho and Johnston (2005) stated that the world "we live in is in the age of neoliberalism" (p.1). The core of the neoliberal school system lies in a complex performative apparatus whose role is not just changing the way schools are governed but reframing the nature of teachers' and school leaders' work (Wilkins et al., 2021). Also, the concept of neoliberalism has spread in some political and academic debates (Furlong, 2013). In the first instance, neoliberalism is a theory of powerful public pedagogy and political, and economic practices that propose that human beings can advance and that free-market uses resources most effectively and efficiently. The part of the state is to form and protect a regulation system suitable for such practices. The state must ensure the quality and astuteness of cash (Harvey, 2005). Moreover, Neoliberal standards of deregulation and free-market choice have been connected to the task of essentially remaking public schools and school systems to reflect the ethos and practices of private enterprises (Wilkins et al., 2020).

In the educational system, neoliberalism takes the form of managerial control, benchmarking of academic assessment and standards, ensuring completion among schools, ranking schools into public and private, academic and non-academic awards, parental choice of school, and compliance through accountability measures (Lo & Hu, 2014). The neoliberal ideology tells a self-serving story of small states and free markets, particularly deregulation, and focused on deregulation, low taxes, and inclined organization. Privatized and market-like courses of action are displayed in favorable terms (Cahill et al., 2018). Mayo (2015) defines neoliberalism as the political form of globalization coming from a U.S. style of capitalism, a type that bases competitiveness on technological innovation combined with low levels of social protection (Mayo, 2015). It encourages the free movement of resources, goods, and enterprises over national boundaries, eventually looking for cheaper resources to maximize benefit and effectiveness. The formation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the United Nations Education and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) indicated a modern time for global policy-making in education. These offices open the way to spread reciprocal, multilateral, and non-governmental endeavors to convert and impact educational frameworks and set international academic guidelines (Green, 2016).

Performance Management System in Education

Based on the human capital theory- which advocates that education and training are worthwhile investments that make people more industrious (Carneiro et al., 2010), numerous economic analyses argue that there is a link between education and growth. According to Benhabib & Berrado (2019), further studies have found a substantial positive relationship between growth and educational quality when compared to quantity. Based on these findings as they continue to explain, there is a huge investment required to improve educational quality, and countries are under growing pressure to develop performance management policies and accountability in their educational systems. They posited that New Public Managerialism proponents have the assumption that to improve school effectiveness and efficiency, education should be viewed as a market product rather than a public good or social service (Benhabib & Berrado, 2019). Page (2016) proposes that Performance Management System (PMS) in schools is understudied, and the studies that do exist are framed in terms of managerialism, performativity, and marketization. The performance management system is aligned with the managerial concept, as opposed to the professional concept, using a labor process theory structure. Page continued that through the ethical duty of teaching, PMS has gained power over teachers by emphasizing that enhanced teacher performance leads to better service to students. From this viewpoint, school administrators carry out their moral duty to remove the "bad teachers", (Page, 2016); that is, teachers that are seen as the "problem" (Chiang et al., 2020) and who seek to avoid their obligations and damage students' education.

Similarly, the implementation of performance management in education is due to laws imposed by the government or other coercive forces. This is highly related to the public sector reforms rolled out under the banner of New Public Management that attempted to promote efficiency, effectiveness, and accountability. As a result, severe funding cuts combined with increased demands have made performance orientation a critical prerequisite for school administrators. School leaders are required by law to guide and record their teachers' performance by first setting individual tasks that are aligned with the institutional goals. They are also obliged to provide continuing training, and feedback, and also to evaluate teachers' performance regularly. This causes teachers to work in what is referred to as a 'performative state'. Thus, new technologies have been created to detect and regulate teachers' work, (Naidu, 2011). However, the performance management system assists teachers in their professional development, supports school improvement, improves teaching and learning, and raises academic standards. Both the evaluator and the teacher are responsible for ensuring that frequent and unbiased feedback is given, that sufficient mentoring, instructions, and development are offered, and also the performance review occurs (Page, 2016).

Performance Management System and Evaluation

Performance management and evaluation share similar key characteristics. Both use carefully recorded and analyzed data to assess how successfully programs deliver services, target the best people, and boost productivity. A performance management system is a systematic procedure by which an institution engages its workers, both as persons and as members of a group, in enhancing the effectiveness of the organization to achieve the institution's vision and mission; while a performance evaluation system is a method of systematically assessing an employee's job performance. Performance evaluation is used to determine how much value an employee adds to a company in terms of increased revenue, as compared to industry norms and overall employee return on investment. The performance evaluation process should be systematic, which means it should be a planned procedure that provides for official rather than informal input (Walker & Moore, 2011). Evaluation adds the element of value judgment. It is interested in the application of its discoveries and entails some assessment of a product's efficiency, social benefit, or acceptability in terms of precisely delineated and agreed-upon aims or values. The evaluation contains suggestions for positive action, as a result, it is a qualitative assessment of the current state of affairs. It requires proof of the program's acceptability, efficiency, or fairness (Manichander, 2016).

Wiener and Jacobs (2011) avow that evaluation systems play a critical role in performance management in the sense that evaluations provide the signs and corresponding results that influence other aspects of performance management. Evaluations serve different purposes, including ascribing ranking to teachers for 'personal decisions', detecting strengths and weaknesses, engaging supervisors and their teachers in contemplating outcomes and practices, as well as recognizing

strategies and goals for development. Nonetheless, evaluations must be reinforced by other essential aspects of a thorough, interrelated set of strategies to discover, build, and maintain the most effective teachers (Wiener & Jacobs, 2011). Although both performance management and evaluation can give valuable data, they are not substitutable. Each has its own set of objectives, benchmarks, and standards for achieving them. The goal of performance management is to make sure that social initiatives work as they should. It necessitates continual internal collection and analysis of data, the ability to ask a range of questions, and the ability to define program goals and benchmarks based on experience and research. While the purpose of an evaluation is to inform experts, policymakers, and investors to enhance knowledge in the sector; performance management ensures social programs run smoothly. Performance management involves continual data gathering and analysis, the versatility to ask different questions, and the ability to use experience and literature to define program standards (Walker & Moore, 2011).

Teacher Evaluation

Teachers are crucial in raising educational standards in schools. Enhancing the productivity and fairness of education is largely dependent on ensuring that teachers are well-equipped, well-trained, and inspired to do their best work. Improving teaching performance is certainly the most likely policy path to result in significant advances in student learning. The ability to effectively monitor and evaluate teaching is critical to improving the quality of teaching and learning in a school. Productive teacher evaluation entails a thorough assessment of a teacher's strengths, performance, and areas for improvement, as well as coaching, support, feedback, and chances for professional development (OECD, 2009). Teacher evaluation refers to "the formal process a school uses to review and rate teachers' performance and effectiveness in the classroom". The results of these evaluations should be utilized to provide feedback to teachers and to drive their professional growth (Sawchuk, 2015).

Similarly, an excellent teacher evaluation process accomplishes two goals: it encourages professional development and provides high-quality instruction. The single most important factor of student learning is the quality of teaching. The school's teacher evaluation system is the way through which it guarantees that teaching is of high quality. As a result, the teacher evaluation system must devise specific criteria such as; it must be valid, trustworthy, rigorous, and defensible, and must be based on a research-based and widely accepted concept of successful teaching. Danielson explains that there are three main determinants of a teacher evaluation system which are: a clear concept of good teaching (the "what"), accurate and equitable techniques to obtain evidence of effective teaching (the "how"), and educated evaluators who can make consistent decisions based on evidence (Danielson, 2007). Evaluation is designed to accelerate the process of learning by revealing what would otherwise be neglected or misinterpreted. An evaluation must include at its heart "scientific activities," because an evaluation cannot be useful if

the observations provided are not genuine or the conclusions are poorly reasoned (Shrinkfield, 1983).

The Performative Teacher

School leaders are being held accountable in most educational systems and many aspects. Performativity discourse has pervaded teachers' work (Jeffrey, 2002). And the growth of performativity as a central element of neoliberalism has been widely discussed and theorized (Apple, 2010) for many years with connections made with tracing its impact of it on teachers' professionalism (Evans, 2008, Wilkin et al., 2021), teachers' identity (Troman et al., 2007; Wilkins et al., 2013) and leadership in performative school systems (Gunter and Forrester, 2010). Instructional leadership relates specifically to the educational context in which performance management is an aspect borrowed from the private sector and regarded as performativity (Bush, 2019). The current performance-dominated culture damages the teaching profession, caused by neoliberal global conditions of "performativity" (Appel, 2020). With the exertion to move forward, teacher quality for the demands of the twenty-first century has brought about projects in human capital formation, building on the thought that high-performing teachers deliver high-performing students for a high-performing economy. Beneath the rule of global financial competition, "high-performance schooling" demands have raised the guidelines and stakes of teachers' performance (Liew, 2012).

With the introduction of performativity, it has drastically affected teachers' relations on three levels which are teacher relationships with students, colleagues, and advisors or inspectors (Jeffrey, 2002). Performativity has made teachers responsible for their performance and the performance of others; that is, it has cognitively reshaped the teacher as a 'performative subject', one whose sense of self is usually informed by what they consider information unveils about them (Ball, 2012). Performativity is the social representation of self through repeated action inspired by power (Kesser, 2021). In this period where performance has been an abrogating degree of teacher quality and school viability, schools and teachers are presently under pressure to compete for acknowledgment on the premise of evaluations, yearly audits, and ranking of tables. The teaching profession is reconstituted through data that renders teacher quality quantifiable, comparable, and visible (Lewis & Holloway, 2018). The performative teachers, as Stephen Ball said, must keep up and endeavor to realize the modern and more different targets which they have set for themselves in their evaluation meetings. They are to go up against their shortcomings, set out on suitable and value-enhancing professional advancement, and take up chances for making themselves more profitable (Ball, 2012). Ball argues that to be audited, an organization must transform itself into an 'auditable commodity', the point that schools and teachers have to create a way to confirm and succeed to performative techniques visibly; what he called 'fabrication.' Stephen Ball defines 'fabrications' as "versions of an organization (or person) which does not exist-they are not 'outside the truth' but

neither do they render simply true or direct accounts; they are produced purposefully to be accountable" (Ball, 2000; 2003)

IV. DISCUSSION

Given the proliferation of performance pay laws and programs in China, teachers see the values of performative techniques as they adapt them to their purposes which in turn, contribute to re-forming their professional values. The performance pay scheme provides rewards to instructors who do exceptionally well, which leads to increased job satisfaction for the teachers and improved academic success for the pupils (Chang et al., 2021). This acceptance is of incredible interest within the educational frameworks where the significance of developing the student, democratic support, engaging in discourse, care, and other issues are not only commended but also mandated. Frostenson and Englund (2020) claimed that teachers consider performative techniques not as adversaries but rather as supportive allies (Frostenson & Englund, 2020). Even though Stephen Ball posited teachers are burdened with the obligation to perform and in case they don't, they are in peril of being seen as unprofessional or irresponsible (Ball, 2016), Frostenson and Englund argued that some teachers have embraced performative techniques as an ideal and professional value of a humanistic kind and rely on it because it does not contradict with their belief. These teachers, as they said, have come to see performative techniques as appealing tools plastic enough to align with, and it is through these performative techniques that school leaders and teachers can identify their strengths and weakness and work on them to improve students' outcomes (Frostenson & Englund, 2020). Performativity provides information and content that is helpful to understand what and who the excellent teacher is through visualization of performance, so teachers conform in order to acquire social status (Chiang et al., 2020).

Again, nothing motivates a worker more than an incentive regardless of how challenging or hectic the job might be. Studies have shown that stipends and compensation help support teachers (Appova & Arbaugh, 2018). Also, financial incentives are a popular strategy that motivates teachers. Teachers comply with neoliberal performative techniques because of the job satisfaction they get in terms of wages, bonuses, and salaries which leads to school improvement, quality education, and student academic achievement (Loh & Hu, 2019). There is always a need for creativity in the global knowledge-based economy, so for this reason, teachers conform to performativity (Burnard & White, 2008), and the working environment of the school also has an impact on why teachers comply with neoliberal performative techniques because a conducive working environment provides teachers with job security and comfort (Kuncoro & Dardiri, 2017). Likewise, teachers' appraisal and feedback have a strong positive influence on teachers and their work. An increase in job satisfaction and job security significantly increases teachers' development as a teacher (OECD, 2010), and moreover, teachers are more profound to understand their work and selves influenced by their social context.

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The conclusion presented in this paper review is a wide ranging-one, which essentially aimed at providing evidence why teachers comply. Even though performativity formed an oppressive milieu (Ball, 2003) in which teachers are subject to its directives, teachers comply with neoliberal performative techniques because it provides them with a stage to gain joy and social acknowledgment, which worked as a psychical motivating force persuading them to utilize for their academic advantages. It also provides an open space for them to practice literary talent, commitment, devotion, and self-validation, as prolific teachers perform as truth-tellers through their excellent academic achievements (Chiang et al., 2020). In addition, performative techniques provide targets against which teachers can compare themselves and others. These techniques permitted the teachers to know what to do and how to work on themselves and their practice. Performative approaches discipline teachers' behavior by characterizing what it implies to be a 'good' teacher by measuring different educational outputs. The teachers of performativity are given the means by which they get to know how to alter their behaviors to continuously work towards excellence (Holloway & Brass, 2018). Moore, A., & Clarke, M. (2016) posited that teachers tend to comply due to the power of discourse and the desire for teachers to learn how to cope with uncomfortable positions, fear of losing one's employment, negative consequences it might have on students, fear of the school they are in to be seen as falling.

After carefully reviewing several research studies, the following recommendations are made:

- As much as teachers comply with neoliberalism, there is always the need for the school authority to follow up with teachers and check their affairs.
- Teachers' working environment is crucial as it's one of the contributing reasons for poor performance or high attrition rate.
- To reduce the pressures that affect the mental health and emotional well-being of teachers (Ball, 2003), school leaders should guide teachers to set clear and achievable classroom objectives.

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