

# An Investigation About the Challenges of Adopting Performance Management in Educational Leadership in England

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## Abstract

Since the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) introduced the performance management system in general education in September 2000, it has become an important component in education reform in England. The goal of this study is to explore the challenges that teachers and principals may encounter in adopting performance management in educational leadership in England. This study finds that performance management provides a single, unfair mechanism for teacher evaluation, and within this framework, teachers' personal development is largely ignored. And for leaders, performance management results in a lack of leadership responsibility. This study argues that performance management is not conducive to the development of schools in England.

**Keywords:** educational leadership, performance management, England education, school principal

## 1. Introduction

In the 1980s, because the power of education management was excessively concentrated in the central and local governments, England schools seriously lacked the freedom of running schools (Birol, 2009). The limited use of funds and teacher training, which made it difficult to carry out their own construction and development. After 1988, the England government took some effective measures to expand the autonomy of schools, primarily, the performance management, introducing competition mechanism and encouraging schools to join the market (Birol, 2009).

Performance management was formally introduced in England education system in September 2000 (Jones, 2013), and can be broadly defined as a system that offers all kinds of evaluations to measure the extent to which the organizational aims are achieved (Birol, 2009). However, it evolves into the over-emphasis of students' academic performance in England schools in recent years and the endless competition between schools (Dean, 2002). It could be suggested that the introduction of the performance does not contribute to a significant improvement to the school in England, by contrast, it is widely criticized as a rather problematic leadership way (Bottery, 2000). In particular, performance management is described as overly emphasizing measurable performance and ignoring values that should underpin the relationship between school leadership and school staff (Tahira et al., 2013).

In response, this paper critically examines the challenges that the schoolteachers and leaders faced in performance management in England schools. The overall structure of the study takes the form of three sections. This paper begins with definitions and examples of performance management in England schools. Then the paper critically evaluated the problems in performance management in England. Finally, this assignment gives some recommendations and conclusions of these school challenges in educational leadership.

Furthermore, I am very interested in performance management, which is a product of neoliberalism. However, compared with China, England is a fully capitalist country, and performance management has been adopted more completely. There are also more relevant studies in England, so it is more appropriate to study performance management in England than in China.

## 2. Defining Performance Management in School Leadership

Performance management is a teacher assessment and management system that uses the school as a unit and incorporates teacher team management, evaluation, and professional development (Harry, 1999). It closely links performance evaluation with personal training and human resources. Sander et al. (2000) propose that

performance management emphasizes teachers' periodic evaluation results and ignores process and teacher evaluation in performance management has overly relied on the school leaders' subjective judgment. Besides, according to Reeves (2002) that the characteristics of an organization that practices performance management are linked to performance requirements to pay. It means performance management is also a standard to decide the salary of teachers. Performance management affects not only organizational performance but also people's motivation (Harry, 1999). Likewise, Reeves (2002) also mention that performance management is a specific set of activities executed by supervisors and pointed at impacting the practices. School performance management is intimately associated with human resource development.

Specifically, practicing performance management in England school generally has three stages, including planning, monitoring and review. Planning performance management is the first thing. Jones (2013) identified that planning invites each teacher to discuss and agree with objectives with his /her team leader and then to record these in an individual plan. It means that through the meeting, school leaders and teachers can determine a new round of performance goals and future development opinions. Secondly, monitoring means the team leader keeps progress under review throughout the cycle, taking any supportive action needed (Jones, 2013). In other words, all schools lesson observations should be accordance with the regulations and then have a clear aim and specific focus. The last stage of the whole performance management cycle is review. In particular, the yearly evaluation will be integrated with setting goals for the next cycle of performance management. This annual performance evaluation focuses on the previously set goals, discusses the teacher's achievements and the teacher's next development needs (Dean, 2002).

### **3. Problems of Performance Management in School Leadership in England Schools**

#### *3.1 For Teachers*

Tahira et al. (2013) point out that teacher plays a very important role in managing performance management in England school. There are many responsibilities of teachers in performance management. Dean (2002) maintains that teachers usually offer constructive feedback on performance and identify their professional areas for development and improvement. For teachers, performance management focuses more on the effectiveness of teaching, monitoring and evaluation to improve the quality of teaching (Cook, 2021). Therefore, they can benefit students, teachers, other staff, and the school community. However, few writers have been drawn on any systematic research into teachers' real feelings and whether performance management is effective or not for teachers in England Schools.

However, adopting performance management in schools tend to generate two issues for teachers. One is that school is hard to ensure the equality of teacher evaluation by using performance management. The excessively single evaluation model of performance management, which takes students' academic performance as the only evaluation criterion (Cardno and Middlewood, 2001). The model does not truly reflect the ability and contribution of teachers. Some scholars argue that schools in England need a much more comprehensive and detailed evaluation system and different kinds of teachers should have different standards to evaluate (Jones et al., 2006). In general, currently, teachers in England are skeptical about whether performance can achieve the goal of promoting teachers' career development and students' academic progress as this system ignores the students' real feedback and does not pay more attention to teachers' performance and self-review. Additionally, identified that students' class performance is also needed to be considered an important factor in measuring teachers' abilities. Macfarlane (2015) stated that when using performance management, schools have much less focus on students' status during courses while student performativity does play as a mirror image of teacher performativity.

According to Harry (1999), performance management included teachers and school leaders, but the main object of performance management is teachers, so teachers' attitude towards this system determines the effectiveness of this system in England. However, an uncomprehensive evaluation system undermines the fairness of teacher evaluation and further weakens teacher morale.

Another issue in performance management is that the development and goal of teachers are ignored by school leaders. Locke (2015) found that in education specifically, 'performance' has come to form the basis of teacher reviews. In England, a performance management system is the most prominently systematic evaluation of teachers' teaching achievements. According to the results of the performance evaluation, the school uses suggestions for the reward and promotion of teachers to the school board (Cook, 2021). For unqualified teachers, the school conducts another evaluation to decide whether to continue to employ them or not.

However, such a single indicator ignores the differences among individual teachers. Under the framework of performance management, teachers are not regarded as a part of the whole organization with autonomy, but only

as machines to achieve teaching results. Motivating teachers who perform poorly only through punishment mechanisms, without proper support, does not help teachers' development and is not conducive to the progress of the school. Jones et al. (2006) pointed that in performance management, poor performance teachers may have low expectations of students, resulting in their poor relationship with students, poor relationship with colleagues and losing motivation.

To conclude, school leaders should take account of teachers' real achievements and set a goal to ensure they can have a reason to work hard. If teachers have poor development and lack energy, the school will be increasingly worse than before.

### *3.2 For School Leaders*

Leadership is identified as important in performance management in school. Once the performance goal is set, the leader's job is to help the staff achieve the goal (Bottery, 2000). In the process of achieving the goals of the faculty and staff, principals and other leaders should be good instructors, maintain timely and sincere communication with the faculty and staff, then continuously guide the faculty and staff to improve performance. Leadership is essential to any notion of development, growth, change or improvement (Cardno and Middlewood, 2001). The process of performance management is the process of management by school leaders in England.

Nevertheless, under the framework of performance management, principals are also unable to conduct leadership practices well. First, too single evaluation ways can lead to a lack of responsibilities for leaders. Bottery (2000) argued that in performance management, most of the school leaders fail to identify and analyze the specific challenges and aspirations of the school. It means after implementing the performance management, school leaders did not target the school development and teachers' expectation. Whilst school leaders use student exam grades to be the only measure of teacher performance, even school development.

Second, performance management provokes or exacerbates the conflict between leaders and teachers, as the process of evaluation in performance management is problematic. For instance, school leaders often do not demonstrate respect and understanding of the teachers in the review stage of performance management. It will decline the satisfaction degree of teachers and then exacerbate conflicts with school team leaders. The challenge for team leaders is to achieve empathy without becoming so intimately involved that personal feelings mask or distort the teacher's view (Locke, 2015).

Cardno and Middlewood (2001) propose that since implementing the performance management, team leaders need to be aware of the emotional reactions of their colleagues to being observed teaching and to the review meeting. It means they also need to be good at reading other people's emotional behavior. Cardno and Middlewood (2001) maintain that performance management has strong emotional content. In other words, this undoubtedly puts a lot of work on the principal and team leaders in a school. They should be aware of the emotional reactions of teachers to be observed teaching and the review of the meeting. If school leaders do not concern about the teachers, it will bring a negative impact on the school. This also hinders the development of the school itself. They also pointed out that emotional fluctuations may occur among the whole teacher group due to the resignation of one teacher. The result is in the spread of negative emotions in the unit which forms a barrier for the healthy development of the unit (Cardno and Middlewood, 2001).

Besides, Tahira et al. (2013) pointed out that in the mechanism of performance management, the evaluation of teachers is usually not completed by the principal alone and usually involves an evaluation team composed of some middle and senior leaders, and this part of the leadership is likely to have the dual responsibilities of teachers and leaders at the same time. Hence, more distinct management of teachers has led to an increase in conflict between administrators and the management in school management.

Finally, the typical performance management behavior of linking performance to rewards and punishments also challenges leaders to execute. Like Jones (2013) suggests that the school incentives are mainly realized in the form of bonuses, but this single reward will often have a counterproductive effect. For example, some teachers will explicitly refuse to work in schools and positions with few rewards. Cook (2021) also believes that in school performance management, to use a single way of rewarding money, which is likely to lead to teachers gradually losing the sense of achievement brought by work. It also greatly weakens the incentive value of the teachers' work. In other words, once in the face of the temptation of the market economy, the teacher's professional pride will fall sharply which causes the teacher to work inertia. It could also lead to the teacher's sudden departure job-hopping phenomenon (Harry, 1999).

Next, in the practice of teacher performance evaluation, team leaders are often reluctant to provide individual teachers with performance evaluation feedback in the England schools. School leaders give performance reports

that are either poorly applied or irrelevant to other systems (Reeves, 2002). This will make the assessment a mere formality, and in the long run, lead to teachers' distrust and indifference to the assessment. They do not know which of their behaviors are expected by the school or do not conform to the organizational goals of the school, even do not know how to improve. Such assessment is only the form and process of words to make teachers fear assessment (Jones, et al., 2006), and ultimately leads to teachers' performance worse than before.

#### **4. Recommendations for School Leaders**

The above discussion revealed that adopted performance management in England schools tends to be problematic for both school leaders and teachers. Hence, for school leaders, it is necessary to develop a set of leadership and management mechanisms that are more conducive to the schools (Reeves, 2002). Primarily, a comprehensive evaluation system for teachers is on the top concern. To be specific, there are many factors that shall be considered in the teaching evaluation system, for example, the class performance of students, the feedback of students, the degree of teacher's own progress. Besides, individual differences among teachers should also be factored into the evaluation process.

Furthermore, the process and mechanism of evaluation and feedback need to be clear and be open to teachers. In performance management, the results of assessments are often seen as having little contribution promoting teacher and school development and realizing achievement, as the actual bearer of the assessment results, the teacher, cannot identify what shall be improved from the assessment results (Reeves, 2002). Therefore, in addition to making the evaluation mechanism open to the evaluators, school leaders also need to pay attention to the communication and feedback with teachers after evaluation (Bottery, 2000), helping teachers understand where career activities fall short and where they can improve. In addition, providing encouragement and psychological support to underperforming teachers after the assessment can also help to strengthen teachers' sense of belonging (Dean, 2002). In other words, providing both kinds of supports can help develop good relationships between leaders and teachers.

Finally, attaching importance to the training and development of teachers and focus on personal professional vision and development of teachers. One of the main criticisms of performance management is that it ignores the development of the teacher, which not only leads to a loss of professional enthusiasm for the teacher but also is not conducive to the progress of the school. For the specific practice to facilitate teachers' professional development, besides, Biral (2009) suggested that it is necessary for leaders to set an appropriate and professional framework for guiding the development of teachers. The framework can be negotiated and settled with leaders, experts, and teachers themselves and could include regular training for professional skills, feedback from leaders, students and colleagues or seminars among teachers for experience sharing and reflection. Setting facilitating teachers' professional development into the formal agenda of school improvement can not only promote the teachers' professional skills but also enhance collective cohesion which can improve teachers' sense of belonging and avoid job burnout (Sander et al., 2000).

#### **5. Conclusion**

In general, performance management in England schools, as many previous studies indicated, is problematic for both school leaders and teachers. First, for teachers, performance management influences the equity of teachers' evaluation. In other words, various factors cannot be considered under performance management and the mechanism is subjective and largely rely on the leaders' perspective. Specifically, the problem of performance management for teachers is that the evaluation index is single, which cannot truly reflect the ability of teachers. Besides, the career development of teachers has been largely ignored under performance management. uncomprehensive and untransparent evaluation mechanisms and neglect of teachers' personal development can lead to a lack of teachers' sense of belonging and enthusiasm for their profession. More importantly, it will undermine the relationship between teachers and leaders in the school.

Secondly, as performance management overemphasizes students' academic achievement, it is likely that school leaders attach no importance to anything other than grades, such as teacher development, school values, etc. In other words, performance management may lead to a lack of leadership accountability for school leaders. Besides, practicing performance management is also challenging for school leaders. For instance, increasing the conflict between leaders and teachers, and leaders are more likely to feel much more stressed than before. Hence, it not only reduces leaders' efficiency but also declines teachers' satisfaction.

Hence, in order to promote school improvement and provide an equal and effective evaluation system, it is necessary for school leaders in England to develop a better leadership style. Specifically, adopting a comprehensive teacher evaluation system that concerns various factors is urgent. Besides, making the process and mechanism of evaluation and feedback clear and open to teachers. Finally, setting facilitating teachers'

professional development into the formal agenda of school improvement is also critical.

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