



PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY IN INDONESIAN ISLAMIC HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION

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Abstract

Given adequate studies on performance appraisal, there is still a lack of study regarding how the performance appraisal is conducted in Islamic higher education institutions, particularly in Indonesia as the biggest Muslim country in the world. With regard to this, the current study aims to explore the lived experience of line managers in Islamic higher education institutions in conducting performance appraisal. By doing so, this study could be the foundation of Islamic higher education institutions in identifying and revealing the current situation regarding the qualities of its people. The current study is a qualitative study with phenomenology as its approach. Data were collected using semi-structured with the sample of the study, which is heads of department since they are the main actor in performance appraisal activities. As the result, this study found four themes related to the lived experiences of department heads in Islamic university in conducting performance appraisal, namely main aspects evaluated, the determinant factors of performance appraisal, benefit obtained and obstacle encountered. Theoretical and practical implications, as well as suggestions for future studies are discussed.

Keywords: performance appraisal, Islamic university, lived experience, phenomenology

Abstrak

Meskipun telah banyak penelitian mengenai penilaian kinerja, masih sedikit penelitian mengenai bagaimana penilaian kinerja dilaksanakan di institusi perguruan tinggi Islam, terutama di Indonesia sebagai negara dengan populasi Muslim terbesar di dunia. Sehubungan dengan hal ini, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi pengalaman para manajer lini pertama di institusi pendidikan tinggi Islam dalam melakukan penilaian kinerja. Dengan demikian, penelitian ini dapat menjadi dasar bagi institusi pendidikan tinggi Islam dalam mengidentifikasi dan mengungkap situasi saat ini mengenai kualitas sumber daya manusianya. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan fenomenologi sebagai pendekatannya. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara semi terstruktur yang dilakukan dengan sampel penelitian, yaitu kepala departemen sebagai aktor utama dalam aktivitas penilaian kinerja. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan empat tema terkait pengalaman kepala departemen di perguruan tinggi Islam dalam melaksanakan penilaian kinerja, yaitu aspek utama yang dievaluasi, faktor penentu dari penilaian kinerja, manfaat yang diperoleh, dan hambatan yang dihadapi. Penelitian ini kemudian menyajikan implikasi teoritis dan praktis, serta saran untuk penelitian selanjutnya.

Keywords: penilaian kinerja, perguruan tinggi Islam, pengalaman hidup, fenomenologi

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, education is one of the most important things for society, particularly Muslim society. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) directed the substance of education when he said the Muslims to get acquaintance even if they had to go to China. Learning is the direction for all human and enables

the people to make any decision in life with their mind and understanding. Besides, many problems in life can be solved by science produced by scientists in educational institutions, especially higher education institutions.

For Muslim society, the existence of Islamic higher education is vital as it is aimed to produce moral, knowledgeable, intelligent and responsible human beings for the creation of a prosperous society (Suyadi et al., 2022). In addition, there are at least three 'assigned roles' of higher education for the Islamic world, namely 'dissemination of knowledge and education, generation of new branches of learning and the training of the personnel needed to meet the Ummah's present and future requirements', but unfortunately the higher education has not met these goals, whether in secular or religious studies, science and technology, or in humanities (Nagah, 2008).

With respect to the global mission of higher education for the Islamic world, the aforementioned issue indicates that the quality of Islamic higher education needs to be improved. Since the quality of people determines the quality of higher education (Akareem & Hossain, 2016), Islamic higher education institutions need to ensure the qualities of its people. Performance appraisal is one of the ways to deal with this issue (Dasanayaka et al., 2021; Sułkowski et al., 2020).

By applying performance appraisal, an Islamic higher education institutions could make decisions for many essential aspects regarding human resource which could lead to increase the quality of organization, such as employee motivation (Khtere, 2020; Sułkowski et al., 2020), employee satisfaction (Dasanayaka et al., 2021), training (Ali & Mahfod, 2015) and so on. In short, performance appraisal would help an Islamic higher education institution to identify and reveal the current problems regarding the qualities of its people as it provides the actual performance of employee and encourages all employees to fulfill their responsibilities (Ibrahim et al., 2022; Mutohar et al., 2020).

Adequate studies on performance appraisal in higher education institutions have been conducted. However, we are still facing a lack of information on the implementation of performance appraisal system, particularly in Islamic higher education. This due to while common principles of performance appraisal may be relevant across various educational settings, the specific and unique characteristics, objectives, and values of Islamic higher education institutions call for a different approach. These kinds of institutions are operated within a distinct ethical and cultural setting, guided by Islamic principles, which adds the complexity of the design and application of performance appraisal systems.

In doing so, the current study aims to address this gap by specifically exploring the experiences of heads of department in the implementation of performance appraisal. Indeed, the party whose role during performance appraisal is important is line manager (Dasanayaka et al., 2021; Kondrasuk, 2011; Townsend & Dundon, 2015; Tyskbo, 2020), which in a higher education institution is represented by head of department, even though performance appraisal is the responsibility of HR department (Rahman-ul-Islam et al., 2014). Indeed, one of line manager's annual reports need to be completed is his/her staff performance appraisal (Baird et al., 2020). Line manager is the evaluator and performance rater (Lee et al. 2021; Van Waeyenberg & Decramer, 2018). This due to they know well about employees' job, competencies, behavior, and other aspects related to employees' daily activities in the workplace. As the evaluator and rater, line manager should objectively appraise as the problem of liking could affect the process and result. Besides, they need to understand what the university expects from its staff and how an individual's competence can be directed to achieve institutional goals (Niyivuga et al. 2019). Therefore, revealing the heads of department's experience is important to understand how performance appraisal in Islamic higher educations is carried out.

The aim to focus this study on the experiences of heads of department is strategic. Heads of department play an important role in translating organizational goals into operational plans at the departmental level. It is also worth noting that their influence on academic staff performance appraisal is crucial since they are laid at the intersection of organizational objectives and daily academic life. Understanding the unique, successes, and challenges faced by heads of department in Islamic higher education institutions is important to devise targeted strategies that align with the objectives of these institutions.

Another point to add, the current study recognizes the strain between the responsibility for managing performance appraisal falling under the HR department and the practical implementation carried out by the heads of department. This issue leads to enigmas about the effectiveness of the implementation, potential conflicts, and the demand for a more integrated approach of performance

appraisal in Islamic higher education institution. By revealing the experiences of heads of department, this study aims to investigate areas for improvement in the process of performance appraisal within Islamic higher education.

Overall, while previous studies have put a foundation for apprehending performance appraisal in higher education, the current study narrows its focus to the context of Islamic higher education and highlighting the role of heads of department. Through this approach, this study is expected to come up with worthwhile contributions that can inform the advancement of performance appraisal systems within the typical landscape of Islamic higher education institutions. Therefore, this research aimed to answer the main research questions: How do department heads in Islamic higher education conduct performance appraisal? What are the lived experiences of department heads in Islamic higher education in conducting performance appraisal?

This research was carried out at the University of Darussalam Gontor, which was established in 1963 and stands as one of Indonesia's oldest Islamic universities. The institution is dedicated to embodying the principles of Islamic teachings in higher education, aspiring to be a distinguished *pesantren*-based university. Its overarching vision is to serve as a hub for the development of knowledge rooted in Islam, promoting the Islamisation of contemporary understanding and emphasizing the study of the Qur'an's language for the betterment of humanity. The university's ethos revolves around core values such as sincerity, simplicity, self-reliance, Islamic brotherhood, and freedom. These principles form the foundation of University of Darussalam Gontor, fostering an atmosphere characterized by mutual respect and a deep commitment to Islamic education. By adhering to these guiding principles, the university cultivates an environment that encourages both personal and intellectual growth among its members.

The university carries out performance appraisals on a biannual basis. The appraisal process systematically evaluates the achievements, contributions, and overall effectiveness of its organizational members. This regular assessment provides a review of staff's performance, helps the university identify its strengths, as well as areas for improvement and developmental. Through this semi-annual process, the university intends to assure continuous professional growth, align people with organizational goals, and maintain the standard of excellence.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Performance Appraisal in University

Organization need to evaluate its employee's performance based on acceptable standard or competency in order to be more competitive and responsive to the environmental changes. Therefore, performance appraisal is an unavoidable agenda for any type of organization. It should be formal, periodically conducted, and concerning on achievements, progress and problem as the basis for a revised performance agreement and personal development plan (Dessler, 2020). Performance appraisal is also highly related to and has been the basis of other human resource activities, such as employee development (e.g., training, coaching), administrative decisions (e.g., compensation, career path), and organizational development (e.g., motivation system, conflicts management, human resource planning) (Torrington et al. 2017).

Performance appraisal in a university is different with other type of organizations since university has its own characteristics in terms of goal diversity and uncertainty. In addition, controlling function is difficult because several particular units, such as faculty, are autonomously in decision-making (Jauhar et al. 2021). University should seriously notice its performance appraisal agenda as it could affect the reformation of the educational system, productivity of academic staff and the overall quality of university (Lohman, 2021). Sherwani (2014) stated that performance appraisal in university is conducted to identify and evaluate the staff's performance, to prepare their incentives and to monitor and evaluate the university's progress to achieve its goals. To make it effective, performance appraisal in university should be intended to the development of such purposes.

Performance Appraisal in Islamic University

The distinctive performance appraisal system could be seen in Islamic university since this type of education institution has a special characteristic, which is founded based on Al Quran and As Sunnah (Indra, 2016). In addition, since information on how performance appraisal system applied in Islamic university is scarce, we could associate the Islamic university as an Islamic organization, in which

designing a performance appraisal system should be based on Islamic principles (Chowdhury et al. 2019).

From the Islamic perspective, performance appraisal is based on normative command. It can be classified into contractual arrangement, self-responsibility and control, and Allah's performance appraisal. Contractual arrangement means that both organization and employees have each responsibility that must be fulfilled (Hashim, 2009). Meanwhile, self-responsibility and control emphasizes moral as well as spiritual aspects which have an important role in monitoring an individual's own performance considering that he or she would be assessed in this world as well as in the hereafter (Rana & Malik, 2016). Finally, the Almighty's assessment of performance is when employees give their best at performance and be responsible regardless their position in the organization (Hashim, 2009).

RESEARCH METHODS

This research is aimed to investigate the experience of department heads in Islamic university in conducting the performance appraisal. In doing so, phenomenological approach was used. This research was carried out in Indonesia, a country with multitudinous number of Islamic higher education institutions. Islamic higher educations in Indonesia emerged with various historical backgrounds (Indra, 2016; Musnandar, 2008). There are three types of Islamic higher education in Indonesia, namely *sekolah tinggi agama Islam*, *institut agama Islam* and *universitas Islam*. Each of them has different organizational systems. This research then focused on *universitas Islam* (Islamic university) as it has the most complex organizational structure according to Regulation of the Republic of Indonesia, Number 12 Year 2002. An Islamic university was chosen for this study. This university is one of the oldest Islamic universities in Indonesia. It was established in 1963.

Data collection was conducted by interviewing five participants. The participants are heads of department who have been assigned to their position for at least two years. According to Saunders and Townsend (2016), a study on organizations and workplaces is recommended to involve a range of 15 to 60 participants. Nevertheless, the number of participants utilized in the current study aligns with Groenewald's (2004) view, which stated that 2-10 participants are sufficient for achieving data saturation in a phenomenological study.

The interviews were semi-structured interviews. This type of interview is very common in social science and is appropriate to researcher who has an overview of his topic so that they can ask questions. The use of structured format then may hinder the depth and richness of the responses. By using semi-structured interview, questions were pre-planned before the interviews were conducted. However, the researcher gave the interviewees the chance to elaborate and explain particular issues through the use of open-ended questions.

Aside from doing interviews, this study also did document analysis. Document analysis was used for triangulation purposes as well as to get a deeper meaning and understanding toward performance evaluation in the Islamic university. For the purposes of this study, the researcher analysed a form which is used for performance appraisal in the university.

All the data were analysed using Colaizzi's strategy (Shosha, 2012). But, due to my original data are across two languages, the analysis then followed the steps suggested by Suryani et al. (2016), who had modified the Colaizzi's strategy. But, because of time constraint, the Suryani's steps were modified as well.

The first step of data analysis of my research is transcribing and translation of interviews. The transcribing was conducted in verbatim, even the expression of the interviewees, such as long pause, also had been noted. The transcriptions then were given to the interviewees via email for verification and validation. The interviewees were asked to read and check the transcriptions thoroughly. After reading and checking the transcriptions, all interviewees stated that there is no problem with the transcriptions, so that they signed the verification form and sent it via email. Once the transcribing and verification and validation were done, the transcripts then were given to a professional translator whose mother language is Javanese language since there were some words were spoken by participants in this language.

The second step is extracting significant statements. In this step, the researcher identifies sentences and phrases that directly related to the phenomenon being investigated. The sentences and phrases were then copied and pasted onto another page and numbered sequentially. In addition, the researcher also took a note for some words which difficult to be translated into English. The third step

is formulating meanings from significant statements. In this step, the researcher reviewed each significant statement and assigned meaning to each. This required both implicit and explicit meanings inherent in each statement. This also involved two fundamental processes, namely intuiting (i.e., eidetic comprehension or accurate interpretation) and reflexivity (i.e., going back and forth between the participants' statements and the initial developed meanings). [Suryani et al. \(2016\)](#) warned the 'bracketing', so that this process requires the researcher to put aside the knowledge on performance appraisal.

The fourth step is organizing the aggregate formalized meanings into theme clusters. In this step, the developed meanings were organized into theme clusters. The fifth step is writing an comprehensive description of the phenomenon. According to Colaizzi as cited in [Suryani et al. \(2016\)](#), in writing a comprehensive description of a phenomenon, a researcher should integrate all related information of the phenomenon being studied. It is also needed for a researcher to revisit the developed meanings and clustered theme to identify the dimensions of the participants' experiences in the process of performance appraisal.

The sixth step is identifying the fundamental structure. In this step, the researcher reviewed the comprehensive description to identify core concepts or key elements that were transposed into a definition of the phenomenon. Finally, the seventh step is validating the comprehensive description with each participant. This step is aimed to ensure that the researcher's perspective is in line with the participants' experience.

Another data to be analysed in this study documents. Document analysis is used in this research as a means of triangulation. The document which was analysed in this research is employee assessment form. For document analysis, the researcher codes significant information. The information then were organised into categories, which is the themes clusters. The final step is writing comprehensive description and interpretation.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

FINDINGS

The data analysis conducted based on interview with participants (details of participants are presented in Table 1) resulted in the main findings of the study, namely the main aspects evaluated, organizational culture as the determinant factor of performance appraisal, benefit obtained and obstacles encountered.

The details of the participants are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1. Participants Profile

Profile	Participant				
	1	2	3	4	5
Gender	Male	Male	Male	Male	Male
Age (years old)	31	30	29	41	38
Qualification	Masters	Masters	Masters	Masters	Masters
Position as head of department (years)	4	3	3	5	4

Source: Data Analysis Process Done by the Researcher

The Main Aspects Evaluated

As a higher education institution, teaching, research and community service is the common aspects should be appraised in University of Darussalam Gontor. Based on document the researcher got from HR Department, there are eight aspects assessed in the performance appraisal, namely loyalty, achievement, responsibility, obedience, honesty, teamwork, initiative and leadership. But, most participants had set the main aspects that should be appraised, ranging from loyalty, responsibility, smart work, students care, brotherhood, to sense of ownership. According to them, prioritizing these aspects during performance appraisal is important since it could help them appraise their staff effectively.

Participant 1 said that the first aspect he used to evaluate is loyalty. Participant 1 then described that loyalty is the reflection of sincerity as well as an all-out work. Participant 1 said that the loyal staff is those who have given their best for the job. Even, participant 1 revealed that all academics and administration staff in his department make the dean of the faculty as a role model of loyalty.

...Our Dean, Mr A, he works all-out and never think about material reward. And it has been imitated by the lecturers and staff in Department I.

Furthermore, participant 1 mentioned responsibility and smart work as other priority aspects should be assessed. Responsibility means how the staff accomplish their duties given by organization. Regarding the smart work, he explained by giving an example of one of his staff whose achievement is good.

Not all people can do the smart work. But alhamdulillah from our secretary, Mrs. B, she is very good in my opinion. She works smartly. So, alhamdulillah we have been awarded three times for the best administration, by BAAK (Bureau of Student Academic and Administration). Mrs. B frequently gets a research grant. Last year and this year.

Similar to participant 1, participant 5 agreed that loyalty is important. Additionally, he also augmented the aspect of *ukhuwah* (Islamic brotherhood).

Our intention is to worship...So we cannot forcibly assess their performance without associating to religiosity...the ukhuwah, the loyalty, which we consider important as well...

Moreover, participant 5 stated that sense of ownership is another aspect that needs to be assessed as well. He explained that the sense of ownership can be elucidated as seriousness in performing jobs.

...from the sense of ownership...how their seriousness in accomplishing every mandate gained...

Meanwhile, staff responsibility in executing their job descriptions is the priority of performance appraisal for participant 4. Moreover, participant 4 described responsible as the manifestation of sincerity. When a staff is given a duty, he/or she should not expect a reward since accomplish a job is simultaneously a form of worship to Allah, and can be a benefit for students and societies.

...All of us, lecturers and staff, have been given job descriptions. So, don't be irresponsible...

Similar to participant 4, participant 2 said:

...in terms of the implementation of the task as well, meaning that a professionalism is not only being evaluated by coworkers but also as human beings whose role is abdullah (servant of Allah). So we intend that everything is solely for worship...

University of Darussalam Gontor is an Islamic boarding university. It gives the students, nonreligious-based course students in particular, both course-based and Islamic materials. As all students stay on campus during their study period, this system indirectly makes the academics and administration staff get an additional duty, which is students care. As participant 3 said, this is the other most important facet should be appraised.

What is special when we enter the Islamic boarding campus, not only teaching, researching and community service. We have one more duty, the fourth duty, which is the management of the students care...

The aforementioned discussion shows that department heads in University of Darussalam Gontor have different style in appraising their staff' performance. Even some of participants augment other aspects which are important in their opinion. They said that this could lead the performance appraisal system in University of Darussalam Gontor to be more comprehensive.

All participants agreed that the performance in academic and personality aspects should be balance. Both aspects are important since University of Darussalam Gontor is an academic institution which emphasizes organizational value as the basis principle of movement. In case of not good performance, participant 4 conveyed that other staff should be ready to help. He used the term of 'sharing', 'back up' and 'ukhuwah' regarding this issue. This means that participant 4 makes teamwork as his priority aspect during performance appraisal.

The Determinant Factors of Performance Appraisal

Participants revealed performance appraisal system in University of Darussalam Gontor is influenced by organizational culture, which is Islamic culture, sincerity in particular. Participants conveyed that sincerity has been the basic value and culture in University of Darussalam Gontor as it is an Islamic university. Besides, all systems and management are based on Islamic worldview. All academic lines, which are teaching, research and community services are always integrated with Islamic worldview. For this purposes, University of Darussalam Gontor routinely hold two-weekly gathering with all organization members without exemption. This routine gathering is aimed to remind the organization value as well as to discuss course-based contemporary issues from Islamic perspective. The discussion frequently encourages staff, academic staff in particular, to learn Islamic values.

Based on this, participants conveyed that performance appraisal in University of Darussalam Gontor is aimed not only for reward, punishment and people development purposes, but also for ensuring whether the organization members have understood and internalized such organizational values. Participant 5 said:

Haaa ...in another university, everything ... all the works ... mmm ... not all ... probably almost the majority of all works are calculated with money or something like that. Money is the motivation of all activities. Even the signature means money. In X everything should be done sincerely. It's hard, but because we have role models from the rector, from the dean, everything is run as expected...

Participant 3 explained that this makes University of Darussalam Gontor differ from other universities, even from other Islamic universities. He narrated his experience when he was working in another Islamic university, in which all activities are measured by money. Reward and punishment make the staff, particularly academic staff, just like a 'factory workers' whose office hours are strict. In University of Darussalam Gontor, normal office hour is 8 hours, but in fact the actual is 24 hours.

...yeah...maybe there is no strict working hours. Any time we want to do our job, no problem, because we are flexible twenty-four hours. The matter is our responsibility can be accomplished without sacrificing the obligations we have to carry out.

Similarly, for participant 1, the organizational values are reflected in staff' behavior. Thus, he stated that he would directly warn the staff regarding his/or her inappropriate behavior. For him, this is also a performance appraisal. For other aspects, such as teaching, he will just follow the regular appraisal by the university, which is at the end of semester.

I will warn them in the forum...in weekly meeting. All people will know. If it is not serious, I just send a private message or I will convey personally...Reminded. First in a subtle way. Then if it doesn't work, I will remind again, haa ... the last is in the forum. Even if the forum is no longer able to deal with the issue, the solution is the dean. There was a lecturer who has now moved on to another university, we decided to ask the dean for the last decision.

Benefit Obtained

Since the performance appraisal is aimed to ensure that the internalization of organizational value, participants feel that such human resource activity has brought positive effect on organization in term of their duties are getting easier to do. In addition, according to participant 4, from the Islamic perspective, the organizational value led to the work hard. As a worker, the organization members seek for nothing but the blessing of Allah. Similar to this, participant 2 said:

..If we want to work overtime, want to work from shubuh, there is no interference at all. Because of the sincerity itself..

On the other hand, participant 1 explained that from an Islamic perspective, such performance appraisal could balance worldly and eternity activities.

...the benefits are when we work, we intend worship. So when it comes to worship, we will feel...ooo...it turns out that the work is intended for worship, we will get peace in life, comfort, and we will not think about...mm...the worldly affairs. For example, buying a house, buying a car, it's no longer our goals. Because we are here lillahi ta'ala^{iv}...because the real goal of life is not because of cars, not for wealth or home, but because our hearts are happy being close to Allah.

Participant 5 explained this balance by saying “one hundred percent for professionalism and one hundred percent for worshipping”. Participant 5 also conveyed that such performance appraisal system could increase the brotherhood within organization. For instance, he frequently asked his staff for prayer in congregation in mosque.

...for example in the case of pray 'let's go for prayer'. Remind each other not only for daily duty, but also in the worship aspect. We also remind each other.

Obstacles Encountered

During the process of performance appraisal, the participants were dilemmatic in analyzing their staff' performance. The participants analysed that the some lecturers' behavior is not in line with the culture adopted by the university, which Islamic culture, since they come from various backgrounds which not related to Islamic culture. Participant 3 said:

The obstacle so far is that the cultural background of the lecturers which the majority did not come from the Islamic boarding school...

Similar to participant 3, participant 5 stated that he needs to be aware of the lecturers' position because understanding an organizational culture is not easy. Participant 5 said that he cannot simply report that the lecturers' performance is not good.

...I have to explain why their performance is not good enough in term of, let say...sincerity. So, the university could understand and take into account regarding this condition...

In contrast, participant 2 explained that there was no significant obstacle during the process of performance appraisal. This due to he used to evaluate his staff' performance routinely in the weekly meeting. He will directly warn the staff in case of his/her behavior is not accordance yet with the value in University of Darussalam Gontor.

...we discussed everything in weekly meeting in the Department X...in each meeting we are always reminded, and even if there is lecturer whose behavior is not in accordance with mm ... rules that are in X, we immediately remind them...

In addition, based on the employees assessment form, before the result of performance appraisal is approved by HR Department, the staff are pleased to respond in case they have an objection toward the result. This indicates University of Darussalam Gontor attempts to build a transparency regarding every management activity. Moreover, this policy means that good communication between leaders and their subordinates is emphasized in this organization.

DISCUSSION

This study aims to explore the experience of heads of department in doing performance appraisal in Islamic higher education institutions. The analysis of interview data elucidates the crucial aspect of the performance appraisal in the context of Islamic university. While the university normally determines the aspects to be evaluated, heads of department, as revealed by this study, displayed a proactive position during performance appraisals. They not only stuck to the predetermined facets, but also initiated the stress on additional aspects they considered essential. This active involvement is in line with the findings of previous literatures. For instance, [Bendaravičienė \(2010\)](#) noted the importance of such initiatives, emphasizing the significance of heads of department in the performance appraisal dynamics.

[Bae \(2006\)](#) states that a fundamental step in the process of performance appraisal is the determination of the aspects of employee performance to be evaluated. This strategic step is important to understand the extent to which an employee's contribution to the organization. [Bae's \(2006\)](#) notions emphasize the essential of this step in preventing the risk of staff assessment being exclusively rooted in the organization's values and objectives. With regard to this perspective, the current study highlights the active involvement of heads of department, who not only acknowledge, but also initiate critical aspects during performance appraisal, leading to a more comprehensive evaluation.

Extending [Bendaravičienė's \(2010\)](#) and [Bae's \(2006\)](#) works, other researchers have also delved the performance appraisal dynamics. For example, studies by [Kondrasuk \(2011\)](#) and [Townsend and Dundon \(2015\)](#) explore the role of line managers in shaping and implementing performance appraisal. Their studies render another context to the understanding of the effect showed by heads of department in the process of performance appraisal.

The initiative attempted by heads of department, as found in this study, indicates a diverse approach to performance evaluation. While recognizing the predetermined dimension set by the university, department heads also acknowledged the need to involve additional aspects that could better capture the multifaceted contributions of their staff. This proactive engagement is not only in line with the findings of previous studies, but also shows the department heads' bright understanding of the dynamics within their organization. It stresses the need to align performance appraisal with the goals and values of their academic units ([Bendaravičienė, 2010](#)).

In essence, the present study contributes to the existing literature by revealing the crucial role played by heads of department in shaping and influencing the performance appraisal process. Their proactive initiatives, in line with prior studies, emphasize the significance of department heads in optimizing and refining performance appraisal systems in the context of Islamic higher education institutions.

Furthermore, the exploration carried out in this study also leads to the profound influence of organizational culture on the performance appraisal process. This is supported by [Flaniken \(2009\)](#) who suggested that the existing organizational culture of an institution can greatly shape its management practices, including the aspects of performance appraisal as well as its underlying purposes. In the context of the current study, the organizational culture under examination is Islamic culture, characterized by values and norms created and developed based on Islamic principles as defined in Al-Qur'an and Al-Hadits ([Hakim, 2012](#)).

The integration of Islamic culture into the process of performance appraisal in the university displays a unique approach to management and evaluation. The inclusion of Islamic values into the organizational activity serves not only as a guidance of the objectives of performance appraisal, but it also acts as the methods and criteria employed in the appraisal process. Such alignment with Islamic values indicates an organizational situation observed by [Dolamore and Richards \(2020\)](#), where culture is acknowledged as a causal impact on decision-making practices and managerial styles.

Overall, the involvement of Islamic culture into the performance appraisal process displays the relevance and utilization of cultural considerations in managing organization ([Harrison & Bazy, 2017](#);

Jerome, 2013). The Islamic culture provides principles through which the institution is managed (Zulkifli et al., 2023). Moreover, it is also instrumental in forming the expectations, values, and norms that underpin the process of performance assessment. Understanding how Islamic cultural elements intersect with organizational practices gives valuable insights into the dynamics of the institution's organizational culture and its contributions to performance appraisal. This comprehensive perspective strengthens the idea that organizational culture is not only a backdrop, but also an influential aspect in the managerial practices (Park, 2018; Rusu et al., 2016; Soetjipto et al., 2021), especially in the context of performance appraisal in an Islamic educational institution.

Furthermore, beyond its central role as an appraising mechanism, the performance appraisal process acts as a fundamental occasion to remind and exaggerate all the organizational members about the objectives of the institution. Participants in the study shared that the performance appraisal process not only gives an opportunity to evaluate individual performance, but also acts as a powerful and effective reminder of the organizational goals. This finding supports the perspective that employee commitment increases simultaneously with their realization of the organizational goals.

The term "work hard" expressed by participants indicates employees' motivational and behavioral view towards enhancing performance. It highlights a proactive approach to work and tasks, characterized by high attentiveness, enthusiasm, and loyalty. This finding aligns with Bhatti et al. (2016), who delineate work hard as an expression of employee behavior and motivation aimed at increasing performance. Employees showing a strong work ethic are inclined to carry out their tasks with high dedication (Farid et al., 2019; Qasim et al., 2022), regardless of situational factors, complexity of the job, or available resources (Meier et al., 2021).

The aforementioned shows that the performance appraisal acts as an accelerator to foster a culture of commitment and dedication among employees. The performance appraisal process has become a way through which organizational objectives are not only evaluated, but also realized by the workforce. The increased awareness of these goals results in a work environment where people show a strong sense of resilience, motivation, and loyalty, aspects that are important to sustain and improve performance.

The final finding of the study is regarding challenges associated with performance appraisal. In this regard, participants showed a sense of dilemma. The heads of department expressed a feeling of being in a "sandwich position," a term indicating the challenging nature of their role in the performance appraisal process. This finding aligns with the observations done by Tyskbo (2020), emphasizing that line managers frequently struggle with the difficulty of effectively assessing their subordinates. The challenges identified involve bureaucratic tendencies, personal relationships, and religious considerations resulting in the complexity of the performance appraisal process.

The variousness of these challenges requires different approaches. To deal with this issue, the university has developed a mechanism where people are encouraged to voice objections should they disagree with the results of the appraisal. This open communication channel plays an important role in addressing disputes and concerns related to the appraisal outcomes. Another point to add, the heads of department are inclined to pursue a discussion about the results with the dean as their immediate supervisor.

This approach reflects the suggestions endeavoured by Hashim (2009), highlighting the importance of rendering employees with a channel to voice their objections if they observe that the appraisal is inaccurate or unfair (Dahle, 2023; Steelman & Williams, 2019). This is in accordance with the fairness and transparency principle in the appraisal process. Giving employees a space to appeal their concern could lead to a sense of procedural justice (Kim & Beehr, 2020; Micacchi et al., 2023) and assures that the appraisal process remains credible and constructive. Overall, the challenges and obstacles faced by the heads of department in assessing their staff's performance mirror a notion of organizational commitment to fairness and open communication. The mechanisms for objection as well as discussion with higher authorities show a commitment of the organization to address issues related to performance appraisal, encouraging a culture of transparency within the educational institution (Dahle, 2023).

CONCLUSION

The findings of this research show that the role of department heads in performance appraisal system is complex. As the evaluator of their staff's performance, they need to, firstly, understand the

critical area should be assessed to avoid the possibility that staff are evaluated for performance that is irrelevant to the organization's goals. In this case, the department heads need to analyse the critical area being the concern. In addition, organizational value plays a vital role in the performance appraisal system in Islamic university. In this case, the organizational value has influenced the department heads' decision making regarding selecting and evaluating critical areas. Moreover, this study also revealed that the organizational value, which is Islamic value, as the basis of the performance appraisal could lead to a better organizational environment.

SUGGESTIONS

For Future Studies

This study was carried out in an Islamic higher education institution. To get deeper understanding regarding the issue, future studies then could consider doing multiple case studies in more than one institution. Moreover, since Islamic and conventional higher education institution might differ in conducting performance appraisal, future studies could also do comparative studies by involving heads of department from both institutions. Furthermore, since it is found that organizational values affect the process of performance appraisal, a quantitative study could be carried out to confirm this relationship.

For Practitioners

Universities should establish clear parameters for the aspects to be evaluated in performance appraisals. This will aid in establishing transparent expectations for both department heads and employees. Additionally, it is crucial for management to recognize the difficulties department heads may face when evaluating their staff's performance, particularly in situations involving religious considerations, personal relationships, or bureaucratic tendencies. Encouraging open communication and offering channels for staff to express concerns or objections about their appraisal outcomes is essential. Furthermore, the department heads have the authority to determine the critical area of assessment. However, since the analysis is carried out by department heads themselves, it could lead to subjective result. Thus, it is suggested to the organization to hold periodic meeting to discuss which area should be emphasized in particular performance appraisal period. Department heads also need to be analytical in the way of thinking regarding this issue to avoid a possibility of irrelevant appraisal aspects. Moreover, there should be a system in place for employees to provide feedback or contest their appraisal scores if they perceive them to be inaccurate or unjust. This will help rectify any discrepancies and ensure fairness in the assessment process. Finally, it is found that the attitude of department heads toward performance appraisal is influenced by organizational value. This requires the organization to internalize its value, so that the department heads understand and relate the value to their managerial activities.

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