



## The Impact of Promotion on Employee Performance: Evidence from Public Sector Universities in Azad Jammu and Kashmir

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### ABSTRACT

Promotion remains a significant function in human resources as it impacts employee engagement, satisfaction, and the overall productivity of an organization. In academics, especially in public universities, it marks the official acknowledgement given to a faculty member for his/ her activities in teaching, research, and service. This research focuses on the evaluation of promotion practices and their impact on employee performance in the public sector universities of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK). This study was conducted using a mixed method of research design, which involved collecting data via questionnaires and interviews with faculty members from various universities. Results showed that although the HEC (Higher Education Commission) has developed policies for promotion at the university level, many issues such as low faculty morale and productivity due to long and inflexible promotion processes, rigid and inconsistent criteria, and widespread favoritism obstruct productive faculty evaluation and promotion. This research has shown that the presence of a transparent and proper promotion planning system can have a direct and positive influence on the output of research and quality of teaching and institutional allegiance. Suggestions to improve lack of equity and effectiveness in the promotion planning process that will enhance the long-term development of these institutions have been made.

**KEYWORDS** Promotion, employee performance, higher education, faculty motivation, public universities, AJK

### INTRODUCTION

Promotion is well accepted as one of the most impactful HRM functions in terms of employee motivation, retention, and organizational productivity (Dessler, 2017; Nawaz & Javed, 2022). Within academic institutions, promotion serves multiple purposes by recognizing the faculty member's contribution in teaching, research, and service which, in turn, improves their self-esteem and loyalty towards the institution (Iqbal et al., 2023). Different from other industries, academic promotion is subject to a rigorous multi-faceted process (HEC of Pakistan).

In AJK, public universities adhere to the HEC faculty promotion guidelines that are designed to be based on equity and objective standards designed to uphold meritocracy and impartiality. However, other studies and existing literature indicate that these guidelines are not always well implemented (Rashid & Zafar, 2024). A lack of timely evaluation, application of arbitrary standards, and even red tape, along with perceptions of favoritism, stand to demotivate promotion as a motivator and sometimes even serve to demotivate actively participating scholars from striving for greater achievement (Ahmed & Khan, 2022).



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Globally, literature affirms that fair and transparent promotion systems contribute to higher research productivity, improved teaching quality, and stronger institutional loyalty (Greenhaus et al., 2010; Ahmed & Khan, 2022). Yet, limited empirical work has been done in the specific context of AJK's public universities. This study aims to fill this gap by investigating the existing promotion practices, identifying their impact on faculty performance, and providing actionable recommendations to strengthen the process.

By doing so, the study not only contributes to the literature on HRM in higher education but also offers practical insights for policymakers and university administrators aiming to foster a meritocratic academic environment.

### Problem Statement

Although public universities in AJK operate under the standardized promotion framework outlined by the HEC, significant disparities exist in its implementation. Faculty members frequently report issues such as prolonged delays, unclear evaluation procedures, and the influence of non-merit factors in decision-making. These challenges can undermine the core objectives of promotion, which are to reward merit, enhance motivation, and improve performance. Without addressing these issues, institutions risk reducing faculty morale, research productivity, and teaching quality, ultimately affecting the quality of higher education in the region.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Promotion and Human Resource Management

Promotion impacts human resources (HR) as it affects employee engagement, turnover, and productivity. Promotion is a formal organizational progression that comes with an increase in responsibilities, power, as well as pay (Dessler, 2017; Iqbal et al., 2023). It is also described by Mathis and Jackson (2011) as an award for performance and an incentive for an employee's future actions. It is a critical tool for motivation.

In the context of higher education, it serves a dual purpose: it is a career advancement opportunity for the faculty and also serves institutional goals such as increased collaboration and engagement, enhanced research productivity, and improved teaching (Ahmed & Khan, 2022; Rashid & Zafar, 2024). Motivational theories, and specifically, Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, places promotion as a long-term job satisfaction motivator (Herzberg et al., 1959).

#### Promotion in Higher Education

The promotion process in the academic field generally involves careful consideration of different performance indicators, including research, pedagogy, administrative responsibilities, and professional development (Brew et al., 2020). In Pakistan, the Higher Education Commission (HEC) has developed a common mechanism for promotions to ensure merit-based evaluation. The standards generally include a minimum number of research papers, participation in professional development courses, and satisfactory performance reports (HEC, 2023).

However, studies show that even in most such regulations, promotion choices are subject to personal concerns, procedural errors, or power dynamics within institutions (Khan et al., 2019). The same has



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been observed in other developing nations, where structural constraints, scarcity of resources, and governance concerns detract from the promise of promotion systems (Altbach, 2021).

### Impact of Promotion on Staff Performance

Empirical research always finds that fair and open promotion procedures positively influence employee performance through motivating, enhancing organizational commitment, and enhancing job satisfaction (Greenhaus et al., 2010; Nawaz & Javed, 2022). In universities, promotions have been found to lead to greater research productivity, more involvement in the governance of the institution, and higher rates of student satisfaction (Brew et al., 2020).

On the other hand, when promotion procedures are perceived to be unfair or unequal, they cause demotivation, low effort, and even turnover (Ahmed & Khan, 2022). Perceived injustice in promotion results can also damage collegial relationships, leading to a climate of mistrust and competition instead of interdependence (Iqbal et al., 2023).

### Challenges in the Promotion Process

Several impediments hinder the effective implementation of promotion systems in higher education. Current challenges include:

Delays in processing applications due to bureaucratic inefficiencies.

Inconsistent application of criteria across departments or faculties.

Overemphasis on quantitative research output at the expense of teaching quality and community engagement.

Limited transparency in evaluation and decision-making processes.

In the context of AJK, anecdotal reports and limited empirical studies indicate that these challenges are exacerbated by resource constraints, political interference, and lack of adequate professional development opportunities (Rashid & Zafar, 2024).

### Theoretical Framework

The study draws upon **Equity Theory** (Adams, 1965), which posits that employees compare their inputs (e.g., effort, achievements) and outputs (e.g., rewards, promotions) to those of their peers. Perceived inequity can result in dissatisfaction and reduced performance. This theoretical lens is particularly relevant in academic settings, where faculty members closely observe peers' career progressions and may perceive disparities in promotion outcomes.

### Summary of Literature Gaps

Although international literature underscores the positive impact of promotion on academic performance, there is limited empirical research focused on the specific context of public sector universities in AJK. Existing studies often generalize findings from larger metropolitan institutions, overlooking the unique socio-economic and governance factors influencing smaller, regional



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universities. This study addresses that gap by providing localized evidence and context-specific recommendations.

### Conceptual Model

The conceptual model for this study illustrates the relationship between **promotion** as the independent variable and **employee performance** as the dependent variable, with **motivation** and **job satisfaction** acting as potential mediating factors.

### Variables

**Independent Variable (IV):** Promotion Practices (e.g., criteria clarity, transparency, fairness, timeliness).

**Dependent Variable (DV):** Employee Performance (e.g., research productivity, teaching effectiveness, administrative contributions).

**Mediators:** Motivation, Job Satisfaction.

### Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Promotion Practices → Motivation → Employee Performance

Promotion Practices → Job Satisfaction → Employee Performance

This model assumes that effective and fair promotion systems improve faculty motivation and job satisfaction, which in turn enhances performance. The theoretical underpinning comes from Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory and Equity Theory, both of which emphasize the role of fairness and recognition in sustaining high performance levels.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

This study employs a **mixed-methods design**, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. The quantitative component examines correlations and predictive relationships, while the qualitative component explores deeper contextual and experiential insights.

### Population and Sample

The target population consists of **faculty members** from public sector universities in Azad Jammu and Kashmir. A **stratified random sampling** technique was used to ensure representation across different faculties (e.g., Social Sciences, Natural Sciences, Management Sciences).

**Population Size:** Approximately 850 faculty members across 5 universities.

**Sample Size:** 210 respondents (calculated using Krejcie & Morgan, 1970 sample size table for a 95% confidence level).



## Data Collection Methods

### Quantitative

### Data:

A structured questionnaire was designed based on validated HRM and performance measurement scales (e.g., Greenhaus et al., 2010; Dessler, 2017). The questionnaire consisted of five sections: demographic information, promotion criteria perceptions, motivation, job satisfaction, and self-reported performance indicators. Responses were measured using a **5-point Likert scale** ranging from “Strongly Disagree” (1) to “Strongly Agree” (5).

### Qualitative

### Data:

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 faculty members to capture in-depth perspectives on promotion processes, challenges, and perceived impacts. Interviews lasted 30–45 minutes and were audio-recorded with participant consent.

## Data Analysis Techniques

### Quantitative Analysis:

**Descriptive statistics** to summarize demographic and perception data.

**Pearson correlation analysis** to examine relationships among variables.

**Multiple regression analysis** to determine the predictive effect of promotion on performance, with motivation and job satisfaction as mediators.

### Qualitative

### Analysis:

Thematic analysis was conducted to identify recurring themes from interview transcripts, following Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-step framework.

## Validity and Reliability

The questionnaire’s internal consistency was measured using **Cronbach’s alpha** ( $\alpha \geq 0.7$  considered acceptable). Content validity was ensured through expert review by three senior HRM academics. For qualitative data, credibility was enhanced through **member checking** and **peer debriefing**.

## Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance was obtained from the University Research Ethics Committee. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was secured, and confidentiality was assured. Data were anonymized, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage.

## RESULTS

### Quantitative Findings

The descriptive statistics revealed that **64%** of respondents agreed that promotion policies were formally documented and accessible, yet only **41%** perceived them as consistently applied. Pearson’s correlation analysis showed:



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Promotion practices had a **strong positive correlation** with faculty performance ( $r = 0.68$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

Promotion practices also correlated positively with motivation ( $r = 0.72$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and job satisfaction ( $r = 0.66$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

Multiple regression results indicated that:

Promotion practices significantly predicted faculty performance ( $\beta = 0.54$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

Motivation partially mediated this relationship (Sobel test,  $p < 0.05$ ).

Job satisfaction also played a partial mediating role.

These findings support Herzberg's view that recognition and advancement opportunities are critical motivators, and align with earlier studies (Ahmed & Khan, 2022; Nawaz & Javed, 2022) highlighting the direct influence of promotion systems on academic output.

### Qualitative Findings

Thematic analysis of interviews revealed four recurring themes:

**Clarity and Transparency:** Faculty members valued clear and well-communicated promotion criteria but expressed concerns about inconsistent interpretation across departments.

**Delays in Processing:** Prolonged evaluation timelines caused frustration and reduced motivation among applicants.

**Perceptions of Bias:** Some respondents perceived favoritism or internal politics influencing promotion outcomes.

**Motivational Impact:** Successful promotion significantly boosted morale, while perceived unfairness discouraged research and service efforts.

### DISCUSSION

The convergence of quantitative and qualitative results demonstrates that while structured promotion systems exist in AJK's public universities, **gaps in transparency, timeliness, and impartiality** limit their full motivational potential. The positive statistical relationships confirm the motivational benefits of promotion when conducted fairly, but interview data suggest that procedural weaknesses undermine these benefits.

This mirrors findings from global higher education contexts, where procedural justice is as important as distributive justice in sustaining employee performance (Colquitt et al., 2013; Greenberg, 1990).

By addressing these gaps, it can bring both individual-level (greater research productivity) and institutional-level (greater academic reputation) benefits.

### CONCLUSION





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The research evidence suggests that promotional strategies play a vital role in enhancing the performance of faculty members in AJK publics; however, inefficiency in procedures and perceived inequalities hinder the realization of maximum outcomes. Faculty motivation and job satisfaction in this regard are important mediators, which emphasize the need for transparent, timely, and merit-based promotion procedures.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

**Standardize Criteria Application:** Implement clear, department-wide guidelines to ensure uniform interpretation of HEC promotion standards.

**Reduce Processing Delays:** Introduce digital tracking systems to monitor promotion applications and timelines.

**Enhance Transparency:** Publish annual promotion reports detailing decisions, timelines, and evaluation processes.

**Capacity-Building Workshops:** Train evaluators and administrative staff on fair assessment practices.

**Feedback Mechanisms:** Provide constructive feedback to unsuccessful applicants to guide future efforts.

### Significance of the Study

This research contributes to the HRM and higher education literature by offering empirical evidence from an underexplored region—AJK. It underscores the need for fairness in promotion, a factor often overshadowed by focus on criteria alone. Practically, the findings can guide university administrators and policymakers in designing promotion systems that not only reward merit but also reinforce long-term faculty engagement and institutional development.

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