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Can Students be Rightful Evaluators of the Performance of their Lecturers?

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Abstract

Student evaluation of their lecturers has been in existence since the 1920s. Since then, researchers, instructors and other stakeholders in education have questioned if the students can be rightful evaluators of their lecturers? This study focused on finding out the validity of responses given by students when giving feedback on their lecturers' performance in higher education. Quantitative approach was adopted for the study. The researchers used Likert-type questionnaire to gather data on students' understanding of the characteristics of their lecturers which contribute positively to the process of teaching and learning, and those that do not. Data distribution curves were used to determine if the students understand the characteristics of their lecturers that positively contribute to their learning. The results showed that while some students can identify the characteristics of the lecturers that can bring about positive learning, some have problems in identifying those characteristics of the lecturers that bring about positive learning. The researchers then concluded that the students cannot be taken to be rightful evaluators of the performance of their lecturers in all circumstances.

Keywords: Evaluators; Lecturers; Student; Performance.

1. Introduction

The performance of the lecturers determine the effectiveness of the process of teaching and learning in higher education (Hajdin and Pazur, 2012). To bring about improvement in the quality of education, the performance of the lecturers is considered as a very important factor (Byrd and Rasberry, 2011; Ko and Sammons, 2014) and varies from one individual to the other. Any institution would strive to have the lecturers with better performance who will raise the standards of their institution. Evaluation of the lecturer's performance serves two basic purposes, it can be either formative or summative. From the formative angle, the evaluation is used to provide feedback to the lecturer in order for him/her to improve his/her performance (Felder and Brent, 2004). Summative feedback is used for administrative purposes such as promotion, tenure, salary increase or to help the students in the course selection (Andrede and Rocha, 2011; Bizuneh, 2016).

There are a number of methods that are used to evaluate the effectiveness of lecturers, which are namely Value-added models, Classroom observations, Principal evaluations, Analysis of classroom artefacts, Portfolios, Self-Reports Practice and Student Evaluations (Little, Goe and Bell, 2009). Giving brief descriptions of each of them, (i) Value-added model is the lecturer/teacher evaluation method that determines which lecturers are successful at improving student learning, it measures the lecturer's contribution in a given period, say a year by comparing the current student score to the scores of the same students in previous school years (Darling-Hammond, 2013). (ii) Classroom observation is usually conducted



by school administrators or outside evaluators and should be done by a person who is experienced and also familiar with the subject being taught (Lasagabaster and Sierra, 2011). The observer sits and observes the lecturer teaching then provides him/her with constructive critical feedback. (iii) Principal evaluation is the classroom observation which is done by the principal or his/her deputy (Little, Goe and Bell, 2009). (iv) Analysis of classroom artefacts is the evaluation method that considers the analysis of classroom artifacts which can include among others lesson plans, student work, assessments and other artifacts (Stecher et al, 2005). (v) Portfolios as the word puts it, is evaluating by using materials compiled by the lecturer to exhibit evidence of their teaching practices, school activities and student progress (Sharp, 1995). (vi) Self-report practice is the method of measurement where lecturers are asked to report on what they are doing in the classroom and may take the form of surveys, interviews or instructional log (Silk et al, 2009). (vii) Student evaluations is the type of evaluation which comes in the form of a questionnaire that asks students to rate lecturers, usually in a Likert-type scale. The students may be asked to assess various aspects from course content to specific teaching practices and behaviour (Little, Goe and Bell, 2009). This research focused on student evaluation which is the evaluation method for lecturers used in most colleges and universities throughout the world (Kelly and Laurier, 2012).

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Evaluation of lecturers' performance in higher education has become rationally important and is recognised as one of the ways in which lecturer effectiveness can be improved. It is therefore of vital importance that the evaluation of performance of the lecturer be done accurately as errors performed might prove to be very detrimental to the quality of education (Bizuneh, 2016) and the future of both the lecturer and the students.

The lecturer evaluation method that has become very common in the institutions of higher learning is the **Students' evaluation of lecturers' performance** (Chuan and Heng, 2013). Since its inception in 1920s in the University of Washington, it has produced a lot of controversies and has received a lot of opposition from instructors. On the other hand, it has been supported by some students and administrators. (Murray, 2005; Calkins and Minari, 2010)

The students' evaluation of lecturers' performance is considered as a very important tool to measure the effectiveness of teaching (Hajdin and Pazur, 2012). It has been argued that as the students are the actual recipients in the process of learning and teaching, they are the best positioned among other stakeholders to evaluate the process. Although the students are the best positioned in the scenario to evaluate the lecturers, one might ask, if they are fit enough to be rightful evaluators? (Wiberg, 2009), do they understand what is needed to be an effective lecturer?. Effectiveness of teaching can mean different things to different people (Iloanya, 2014). The way the students view teaching effectiveness differs from how the lecturer eyes it. The students look at the manifestations like being helpful and content presentation whereas the lecturers look at the stimulation of interest and lesson preparation.

Despite the students being in the centre of the process of learning and teaching, some researchers have found loopholes in the students' evaluation of lecturers. These conclusions have been arrived at in a number of institutions of higher learning around the world. Coming to Botswana's institutions of higher learning, not much has been documented so far. This study therefore aims to investigate the situation in Botswana's higher education system.

1.3. Research Objectives

Determine if the students are knowledgeable enough to evaluate the teaching of the lecturer.

Find out if the students can determine the fate of their lecturers through giving feedback on their teaching.

1.4. Research Questions

Are the students in a position to give a fair evaluation of their lecturers?

Can students determine the fate of their lecturers through students' feedback?

2. Review of Literature

Students' evaluations of their lecturers came into practice in the United States of America in the 1920s at the University of Washington (Calkins and Mcari, 2010). Since then much concern has been directed to the fairness of instruments used to measure the effectiveness of the lecturer. A lot of controversy has surrounded it and has received a lot of resistance from the lecturers and teachers (Murray, 2005). Lecturer evaluation by their students is now used in most institutions of higher learning throughout the world, but the controversy still stands because of the way they are conducted and among the teacher evaluation methods, it has received the most attention (Chuan and Heng, 2013).

There has been a lot of debates on the validity and the reliability of the students' evaluation of teaching. Scholarly works have compared the student ratings and the coordinator ratings, and found that there is some consistency between the ratings of the two groups. They then concluded that student evaluation of their lecturers is capable of providing useful feedback to the lecturers and the administrators. On their recommendation they pointed out that the student evaluation



should not be used by itself for administrative purposes, it should be used with reference with other evaluation methods. (Ustunluoglu and Can, 2012)

Some researchers argue that the exercise is too subjective, the students are not being objective as they do the evaluations and there is a lot of bias. Andrade and Rocha (2012) observed that there are a number of factors that affect the results of the evaluation of lecturers by their students. They observed that lecturers at times buy better score ratings by inflating the class ratings, (Andrade and Rocha, 2012) they also observed that class size also plays a major role in the outcomes. They went on to conclude that experience seems to affect the evaluation of the lecturer by their students, and it is important to adjust the ranking during analysis. The pair also observed that during the evaluation the link between the quality and the effectiveness of teaching is not clear.

In the study carried out by Bizuneh in his journal paper "Factors that Affect Teachers' Performance Appraisal at Bahir Dar Polytechnic College", it was revealed that some of the criteria used in the evaluation of teachers by the students and other evaluators do not consider the level of the learners, their characteristics nor the materials being used. It was also observed that some criteria were not directly related to the classroom instruction and the standards were not achievable to motivate teachers. This caused the teachers not to have confidence on the evaluators' knowledge of how to use the evaluation instruments. It's also assumed that evaluators evaluate teachers' performance based on their relationships and some external duties. In conclusion Bizuneh states that evaluators in his work were incompetent to evaluate teachers' performance because of lack of skills, knowledge, experiences and appropriate use of the instrument (Bizuneh , 2016) who were the evaluators

Bias during the rating of instructors by the students is also an issue in the outcome of the rating results. Young, Rush and Shaw have shown that when the students evaluated the teachers on issues closely aligned with content and pedagogy, they showed some gender bias. The bias was shown towards their own genders, that girls favoured lady teachers and boys males (Young, Rush and Shaw, 2009)

3. Methodology

Two institutions of Higher education in Botswana were used for the study. The institutions are Botho University and Botswana Accountancy College. Botho University is a private institution and the Botswana Accountancy College is state owned. The two institutions are situated in Botswana's capital city, Gaborone. 140 students were selected from Botho University and 120 students were chosen from Botswana Accountancy College.

The research approach employed to gather all the relevant data was the quantitative method as the data had to be quantified and then analysed (Kumar, 2011). The rationale for using a quantitative approach in this research was to reach out to a good number of students and to find out if the students understand the characteristics of the lecturer that positively contribute to their learning-teaching process. The data was collected by means of questionnaires, in which the students were to demonstrate their understanding of the characteristics of the instructor that positively contribute to the learning-teaching process, using closed five point-Likert scale questions, see table 1 and table 2 (Boone and Boone, 2012). The questions were meant to find out if the students understand what quality teaching is, by asking questions which will show if they can identify the characteristics of a lecturer that can contribute to their positive learning and those that do not. The data was then analysed by Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) using percentages.

The selection of the two institutions followed non-probability sampling(Kumar, 2011; Bhattacharjee, 2012) as the researchers observed that they are central in terms of population distribution and they draw students from all over Botswana, therefore their students can better represent the Batswana students at their level. The questionnaires were given to selected lecturers in the two institutions who then distributed them to some groups of their choice in their institutions. The students responded to the questionnaires and the lecturers collected them and handed back to the researchers.

4. Data Analysis and Discussion of Results

The data that was collected on students' evaluation of their lecturers, was entered and ran in Statistical Packages for Social Sciences. The presentation of the outcomes of the results was presented in percentages as shown in table 1 and table 2 below. Students were asked to rate the characteristics of their lecturers as perceived by them (the students).



Table 1-Data from Botho University

	(1)Do not agree	(2)Neutral	w(3)Partly Agree	(4)Agree	(5)Strongly Agree
Knowledgeable (dominates the content)	5.9	15.1	18.5	33.6	26.9
Friendliness and congeniality	5	14.3	8.4	42	30
Good sense of humor outside class	8.4	30.3	16	31.9	13.4
Approachable outside lesson hours	10.2	16.1	14.4	40.7	18.6
Gives easy assignments where you score high marks	31.1	26.9	22.7	16	4.2
Gives manageable assignments where you score average marks	7.6	30.3	27.7	28.6	5.9
Gives tough assignments where you score low marks	30.3	31.9	20.2	9.2	8.4
Hardly gives assignments	42	27.7	17.6	7.6	5
Gives moderate assignments	10.2	30.5	27.1	23.7	8.5
Gives a lot of assignments	16.8	33.6	23.5	17.6	8.4
Physical presentation, dressing, smartness	10.9	16.8	17.6	35.3	19.3
Is strict does not tolerate late coming, chatting during lesson, strict on dead lines	16.1	27.1	20.3	19.5	16.9
Very lenient, not strict on deadlines	32.8	34.5	7.6	20.2	5
Like throwing jokes during lessons	10.9	28.6	26.1	21.8	12.6
Very tolerant, understands when students come late	9.3	31.4	22	27.1	10.2
Very lenient in marking tests and assignments	30.3	27.7	17.6	16	8.4
Strict in marking tests and assignments	7.6	23.5	21.8	26.1	21



Table 2-Data from Botswana Accountancy College University

	(1)Do not agree	(2)Neutral	(3)Partly Agree	(4)Agree	(5)Strongly Agree
Knowledgeable (dominates the content)	26	18.8	20.5	39.3	18.8
Friendliness and congeniality	15.8	0	16.7	45	22.5
Good sense of humor outside class	5.9	15.3	25.4	34.7	18.6
Approachable outside lesson hours	9.5	11.2	18.1	44	17.2
Gives easy assignments where you score high marks	30.5	28.0	14.4	20.3	6.8
Gives manageable assignments where you score average marks	16.7	30	22.5	25	5.8
Gives tough assignments where you score low marks	25.4	33.9	21.2	16.1	3.4
Hardly gives assignments	42.7	21.4	19.7	11.1	5.1
Gives moderate assignments	23.9	26.5	23.1	23.9	2.6
Gives a lot of assignments	18.5	32.8	16	20.2	12.6
Physical presentation, dressing, smartness	9.6	20.9	20	29.6	20
Is strict does not tolerate late coming, chatting during lesson, strict on dead lines	11.8	18.5	20.2	31.1	18.5
Very lenient, not strict on deadlines	35.8	24.2	18.3	15	6.7
Like throwing jokes during lessons	12.6	18.5	26.9	26.9	15.1
Very tolerant, understands when students come late	22.2	23.9	17.9	29.1	6.8
Very lenient in marking tests and assignments	27.7	21.8	19.3	25.2	5.9
Strict in marking tests and assignments	16	15.1	16	28.6	24.4

Based on the data collected, results in the tables above, show so many contradicting patterns. This distribution of data can be better understood when the percentages are viewed in a distribution graph as indicated fig.1, 2 and 3 below. The characteristics can be grouped into three categories. Those that contribute positively to the cognitive process, where the students are supposed to rate the lecturer with high scores, and then, those that if present and manifest during the process of teaching can bring detrimental results and finally those that might not change anything, that is will neither disadvantage nor advantage the students.

The data of the characteristics that have a positive contribution to teaching and learning should have followed left(negative) skew distribution graph as many students should give the lecturer a high score that is *agree* or *strongly agree* as shown in figure 1. In this distribution, most data is concentrated to the right as the variations *agree* and *strongly agree* receive the highest percentages and are situated at the right side of Likert scale.

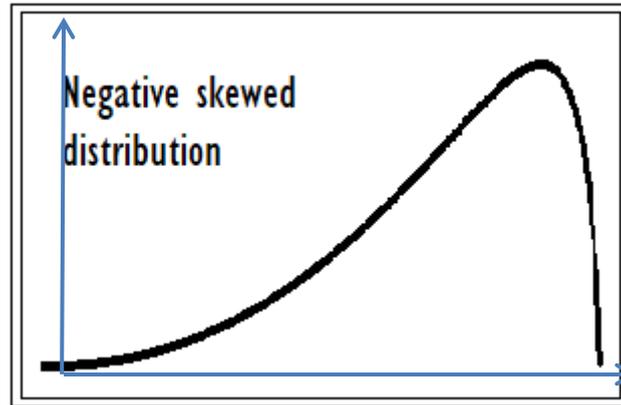


Figure 1-Negative skew distribution curve

Those that contribute negatively to the cognitive process should give a right or positive skew distribution as the students will rate the lecturer with a low grade, *do not agree* as shown in figure 2. In this type of distribution most data is concentrated to the left as the variation *do not agree* which receives the highest percentage is situated to the left of the Likert-scale.

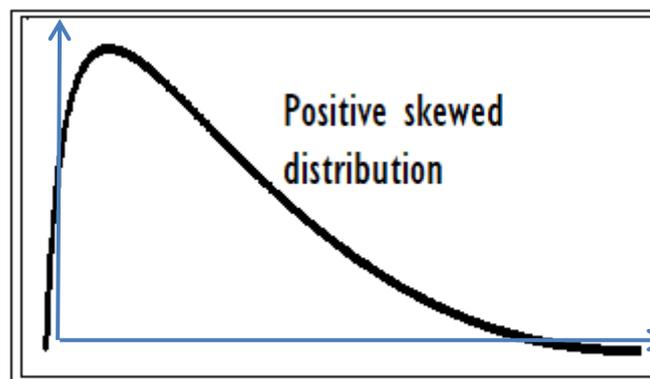


Fig 2-Positive distribution Curve

Those which have no contribution to the process of learning and teaching, should give slightly skewed to the right or normal distribution as most of the answers are likely to be *neutral or partly agree*. In this distribution most data is concentrated in the centre as shown in figure 3 as variations *neutral* and *partly neutral* are situated at the central position of the Likert scale giving the highest pick of the graph in the central position.

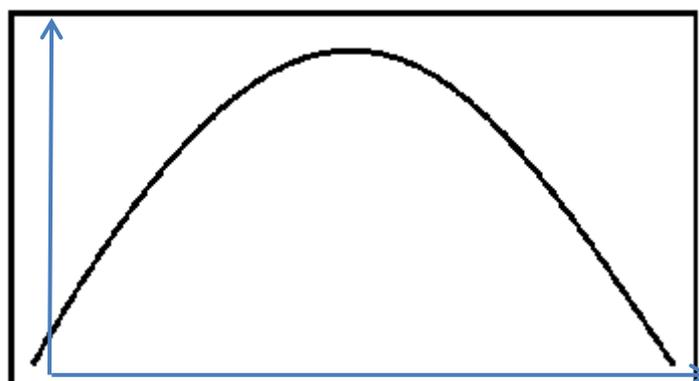


Figure 3-Normal distribution curve

The graphs are not shown in the tables above as the work was going to be too clustered, but the pattern of the resulting percentages shows which type of distribution pattern they follow. Some of the data distributions do not produce the expected distribution patterns.

The characteristics of the lecturers which contribute positively to the process of teaching and learning which were investigated in this study are knowledgeable, friendliness and congeniality, approachable outside class, giving tough



assignments, giving a lot of assignments, strict in class, strict in marking tests and assignments. As these help the students to learn, if the students understand the characteristics of the lecturer which help them they will then give high ratings to the lecturer with such characteristics. The expected graphs from these characteristics should be skewed to the left as most or all the students will choose *agree* or *strongly agree*.

Looking at the distribution of data in the characteristics listed in the tables above, some distributions are not skewed to the left as what would be the case if the students understood that those characteristics have a positive contribution to their learning.

On knowledgeable that is having a good understanding of the content, Botho shows correct distribution that is the data when plotted would give a graph skewed to the left, but the distribution obtained from Botswana Accountancy College is almost a normal one. Friendliness and congeniality got near perfect data distribution from both institutions. Approachable outside the class room will allow the students to seek individual attention outside class and have their problems clarified, which is a good characteristic. Both groups managed to produce near expected distribution patterns. For the characteristic on the question of giving tough assignments, both groups of respondents gave positively skewed distributions instead of negatively skewed. The implication of this is that, the students do not understand the characteristics of the lectures they were rating in the questionnaire.

For characteristics of the lecturer that have a negative impact in teaching, that were investigated in this study are giving easy assignments, very lenient in marking, tests and assignments, hardly gives assignments, very tolerant allows the students coming late and not strict on deadlines. The expected distribution should be positively skewed.

On the issue of giving easy assignment, both institutions got the correct distribution graph because, it was positively skewed. For the characteristic of the lecturer being very lenient, Botswana Accountancy College got the expected positively skewed distribution but Botho University produced an almost uniform distribution pattern, which shows some confusion in understanding the characteristic. For hardly gives assignment characteristic, both institutions managed to understand that it is not a good trait for the lecturer and had positively skewed graphs. On very tolerant and understanding when students come late, both groups show a distributions which are not positively skewed which was an indication that, the participants do not understand the characteristics of the lecturers they were rating. On leniency on deadlines, for both groups, the results showed a positively skewed graph, the implication being that, they felt it was not a good characteristic for a lecturer.

There are some characteristics which have no or very little significance in the process of learning and teaching. Included here are very lenient in class, physical presentation and sense of humour outside class and throwing jokes during the lesson. These characteristics as they have very little to contribute in the process of learning they can have neutral or partly agree, which gives a normal or slightly right skewed distribution pattern.

The data distribution on physical presentation of the lecturer shows almost uniform distribution, which is not the expected pattern. Physical appearance of the lecturer may make the students have some respect for the lecturer, but will not contribute much on his/her effectiveness in content delivery. The sense of humor outside class does not have much effect on the learning process, it should have given a normal or lightly skewed distribution, Botho University had a normal distribution but Botswana Accountancy College showed a uniform distribution.

5. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to determine if the students can be reliable evaluators of their lecturers. The study identified different characteristics that a lecturer can possess, and used the Likert-scale questionnaire to find out if the students can differentiate between the characteristics that contribute to their learning and those that do not.

The results revealed that, not all the students understand the characteristics of the lecturer which contribute to their learning and which do not. Looking at some distributions which do not follow the expected distribution patterns it shows that there are some students who really do understand, what is needed from them as they evaluate their lecturers, but it has been seen here that there are some who are not able to distinguish between the necessary and the unnecessary characteristics. It is therefore, advisable for the institutions concerned to use their discretion in interpreting the results appropriately.

6. Recommendations

Findings from the study revealed that, students' interpretation of the characteristics of their lecturers that are vital to learning and those that are not differ, it then becomes difficult to come up with a reliable rating from the students. If students' evaluation of their lecturers' performance is to be used for summative purposes, the interpretations of the students' ratings need to be further scrutinised by the personnel taking the feedback. In addition, as indicated by other researchers, students' evaluations should be used in conjunction with other evaluating methods.

Student evaluation of their lecturers should be used for formative purposes as some of the students used for this study, have demonstrated that they have a sound understanding of the characteristics of the lecturer that contribute to their



learning, and those that do not. In this case, it is advisable for institutions to thoroughly scrutinise student feedback and consider those which make sense and discard what shows misunderstanding of the true characteristics of the lecturer.

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