DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 192 648 HE 013 108

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TITLE Student Ratings and Image for an Ideal Professor.
PUB DATE Feb 79
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Eastern Educational Research Association (Kiawah Island, SC, February 1979).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *College Faculty; College Students; *Education Courses; *Evaluation Criteria; *Expectation; Higher Education; Pretests Posttests; Student Attitudes; *Student Evaluation of Teacher Performance; Teacher Effectiveness; *Teacher Evaluation

ABSTRACT

A 16-item Q-sort evaluation of teaching was administered to 2,784 graduate and undergraduate students in education at a state university. Four subscales based on Spady's (1974) teacher competencies model, subject expertise, pedagogical expertise, stimulation and empathy were obtained from two pilot studies. Test-retest reliability and construct validity were established. On the pre-course sort, the most important characteristics of an ideal professor were "knowledge of subject matter" followed by "communicates clearly" and "presents well-organized course." On the post-test evaluation of the professor these factors plus "enthusiastic about teaching" were obtained. Correlations between pre-test and post-test were significant at the .001 level and ranged from .30 to .50. Students' ratings of professors appear to be little more than their scaling of the professor against their expectations. If they get what they expect the professor rates high, and if it is different, the professor rates low. Reexamination of the use of student rating forms for important decisions is suggested. (Author/SW)

Student Ratings and Image for an Ideal Professor

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Paper presented at the Eastern Educational Research Association Annual Meeting, Kiawah Island, S.C., February 1979.

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The influence of expectations on student ratings of their professors was introduced in a previous paper (O'Tuel, 1978). The development of an instrument to measure this expectancy and the ratings by students of how they preceive their professors was described. Test-retest and KR-20 reliability coefficients as well as logical and empirical validation of the instrument was reported.

Following the pilot studies reported earlier, a large scale study was undertaken. The results of this study are the substance of this paper.

Treffinger and Feldhusen (1970) found that generalized precourse ratings of other courses at an institution predict student evaluations of an instructor at the end of his/her course. The Dr. Fox effect reported by Ware and Williams (1976) indicated that students were evaluating the professors enthusiasm rather than other characteristics of instruction. Winne (1977) explained inconsistencies in the findings of nominally similar treatments as aptitude treatment interactions. He stated, "for example, students' preference for one or another kind of teaching may influence learning and attitudes differently when the teaching they receive corresponds to their preferences or expectation in ratings of instructors is the issue in this study.

Questions asked were:

1. What items and categories are most important to students?

2. What is the correlation between student expectancy and the ratings of a professor?

3. Are there differences in these relationships across levels, undergraduate and graduate and across subject areas?

4. What is the correlation between the expectancy-reality relation and general course satisfaction?

Method

Sample

The sample was composed of 2784 college students, graduates and undergraduates. All students in a College of Education at a state university were asked to participate.

Instrument

The Student Expectancy Evaluation (SEE), a Q-Sort was used for the pre and post measures. It contains 16 items (see Appendix A), 4 items in each subscale. The subscales are subject expertise, pedagogical expertise, stimulation, and empathy. Test-retest reliability was .73 and .81 on previous pilot samples. Logical validation by experts and empirical validation by factor analysis were used to establish validity.

Procedures

Students were administered the pretest (and posttest) by an outside examiner who came into each class during one of the first two class meetings of the semester. Administration followed standardized procedures. Students were instructed to stack the 16 statements about teachers in the order from most to least importance for an ideal teacher of the particular course in which they were enrolled. These were recorded. On next to the last class of the semester the examiner returned to the classrooms and instructed

students to stack the cards in order according to how they perceived their professor to have been. Various nominal data such as sex, age, course required or elected, student parttime or fulltime and student graduate or undergraduate were collected on the pretest. On the posttest these spaces were used to assess student satisfaction with the course. Five items four of which could be answered from 1 to 4 being the positive evaluative end of the satisfaction and 1 with a 1 or 2 response were inserted.

Following the collection of data analyses were run by the Computer Center, University of South Carolina using Statistical Analysis System (SAS), Statistical Packages for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and FORTRAN programs. The correlations between the pre (ideal) and post (reality) were converted to Fischer Z's. A Spearman Rho was computed on the Z's and the scores on the satisfaction items to estimate the relationship between students' perceived match on pre and post and their satisfaction with course.

Results

On the pretest item with the lowest (most important) rank (3.69) was "has competency in and knowledge about the subject." "Communicates ideas clearly" was second followed by "presents a well organized course" and "is enthusaistic about the subject and about teaching." For the mean rank of each item as students stacked them to correspond with what they felt was most to least important for an ideal teacher in that course see Table 1. The mean rank for the four subscales (categories) placed stimulation first followed by pedagogical expertise, then subject expertise and last empathy.

Place Table 1 About Here

On the posttest which was the ranks students assigned to how they perceived the professor to have been during the semester, called reality, the most representative characteristic of their professors was "has competence in and knowledge about subject." "Is enthusiastic about subject and about teaching" was second. "Presents a well organized course" was third; "relates knowledge of subject matter to solutions of practical problems" ranked fourth followed closely by "communicates ideas clearly" (See Table 1). Of the subscales the most representative was subject expertise, then pedagogical expertise; stimulation and empathy followed in that order.

The correlations between pre (ideal) and post (reality) were converted to Fisher's Z's. Scores on the 5 course satisfaction items were then correlated with the Z's. Spearman Rho's for these are reported by subject areas (see Table 2). All are significant at the .0001 level. They range from .30 to .50. Although there was differences across classes in the pre-post correlations, there were no significant differences between levels or between areas.

Place Table 2 About Here

Discussion

The item which students ranked as most important for an ideal professor for the course was also what they perceived they received, "knowledge and competence in the subject." "Enthusiasm" was consistent in the pre and post as was "well organized course." "Communicates ideas clearly" was not quite as representative of reality as ideal but an additional characteristic the

the students perceived they received in the courses was "relating knowledge to solutions of practial problems."

Pedagogical expertise had been ranked first on the ideal and was second on the perceived. Subject expertise was ranked first in perceived but was third on the subscales for ideal. Stimulation dropped from second on ideal to third on perceived and empathy ran fourth for both ideal and perceived. Spady (1974) proposed that the most important component of a teacher's repertory of abilities was the capacity to establish a sense of rapport with students by caring aboutthem as individuals. His position was that the critical variable was empathy and concern because as students mature (level of development expectation) teachers' charisma and areas of expertise would erode in value. The evidence from this study of college students is contrary to Spady's writings. Empathy was a poor fourth in the categories and none of the items from that subscale were in the top 5 ranks.

It would appear that students want to get the money's worth which they interpret as expert knowledge in a well organized course which is presented as interestingly as possible, not whether the teacher takes a personal interest in them as an individual.

Furthermore, the results indicate that students who think they get what they thought they wanted are "satisfied" with the course. Where does that leave student ratings of professors? Somewhere between pergatory and limbo? Students' ratings of professors appear to be little more than their scaling of the professor against their expectations. If they think they received what they wanted, the professor gets a high rating. If it was not what they expected, the professor gets a low rating. Unless we can control or at least assess students' expectations, we had better be extremely cautious about any decisions based on student evaluations.

Table 1

Mean Rank of 16 Items and Category on Pre (Ideal) and Post (Reality) for Total Sample

Item	Pre 2784	Post 1791
1. ----------	4.78 (3.18)	7.82 (4.34)
2. ----------	9.02 (4.12)	8.82 (4.48)
3. ----------	9.72 (4.25)	9.07 (4.57)
4. ----------	5.78 (4.18)	7.53 (5.20)
5. ----------	11.47 (3.81)	8.64 (4.18)
6. ----------	3.69 (3.57)	3.72 (3.69)
7. ----------	11.18 (4.21)	8.87 (4.69)
8. ----------	7.78 (4.153)	7.57 (4.19)
9. ----------	7.80 (3.69)	8.56 (3.89)
10. ----------	11.43 (4.59)	10.01 (4.69)
11. ----------	10.19 (3.90)	9.21 (4.29)
12. ----------	10.21 (4.38)	9.71 (4.60)
13. ----------	8.67 (3.92)	9.87 (3.83)
14. ----------	9.25 (3.86)	10.15 (3.90)
15. ----------	5.93 (4.10)	6.03 (4.31)
16. ----------	9.09 (3.77)	10.53 (3.59)
Pedagogical Expertise	7.33 (2.16	8.31 (2.53)

Table 1 (Continued)

Item	Pre 2784	Post 1791
Subject Expertise	8.53 (2.34)	7.17 (2.48)
Empathy	9.91 (2.77)	9.37 (2.95)
Stimulation	8.24 (2.33)	9.15 (2.26)

Table 2

Spearman Rho Correlation Coefficients
between Pre-Post Correlation (Converted) and the Score on
Course Satisfaction by Area

	Foundations	Career Development	Curriculum & Instruction
Correlation between Pre-Post (converted) and Satisfaction	N = 724 .30[a]	N = 383 .35[a]	N = 120 .50[a]

note: a = $p < .001$

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Appendix A

Evaluation Items

1. Communicates Ideas Clearly
2. Classes are Organized to Allow for Meaningful Interactions
3. Evaluates Consistently and in an Unbiased Manner
4. Presents a Well Organized Course
5. Answers Impromptu Questions Asked
6. Has Competence in, and Knowledge About, Subject
7. Identifies Basic "Truths" of Subject Area
8. Relates Knowledge of Subject Matter to Solution of Practical Problems
9. Is Interested in Whether Each Student Understands the Material
10. Is Someone with Whom a Student Can Identify and Relate
11. Appreciates Each Student's Efforts
12. Is Sensitive to the Personal Needs of Each Student
13. Stimulates Students Intellectually
14. Excites Students to Think for Themselves About Problem and Issues
15. Is Enthusiastic about the Subject and About Teaching
16. Motivates Students to Do Their Best