

Lecturers' perception of student evaluation in Nigerian Universities

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The need for improvement in undergraduate instruction in Nigerian Universities necessitated this investigation. The survey used a random sample of 200 lecturers drawn from five of the public universities in Nigeria. It sought to find out how lecturers perceive the importance of student evaluation, both for formative and summative purposes. The 20-item questionnaire used for the collection of data had a reliability coefficient of 0.61. The data collected were analysed using the Z-test statistic. It was found that lecturers generally do not accept student evaluation, particularly when it is for summative purposes. Despite lecturers' apprehension, it is recommended that student evaluation of classroom teaching should be made mandatory and conducted regularly in Nigerian universities.

Formative evaluation, summative evaluation, university teaching, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Just how good university teaching is globally and how good it should be are two questions that have no exact answer. The complaints about the quality of undergraduate instruction are both current and chronic (Eble, 1974). A rare glimpse of teaching as it goes on inside university classrooms was afforded by Kilpatrick (1997) where he concluded that aimlessness is the most important single cause of ineffective teaching. His recommendations, which include the need for better preparation of graduate students as teachers and effective in-service programs for improving the quality of instruction, are as pertinent now as they were then.

Though there is great desire for effective undergraduate teaching in our universities, recognition and evaluation of it have different applications for different institutions. While some shy away from formalising the means by which a faculty teacher's teaching competence is judged, others are reluctant to give students a voice in the decisions that affect a faculty member's career (Eble, 1974). However, institutions are beginning to appreciate the fact that there are many sources of information about teaching effectiveness and many ways of bringing that information to bear upon the evaluation of teaching. According to Richmond (2003) and Clifford (1999), student opinion is of particular importance because it represents an important addition to the data customarily used to judge faculty competence. It is the one source of direct and extensive observations of the way teachers carry out their daily and long-range tasks. Eble (1974) identified the benefits of student evaluation to include the following:

1. Student evaluation increases the chances that excellence in teaching will be recognised and rewarded.

2. Student evaluation provides a means of participating between students and teachers in the teaching-learning process and raises the whole level of instruction.
3. Evaluation provides the only direct and extensive information about a faculty member's teaching.
4. An institution may be stimulated by student evaluation of teaching to consider its overall goals and values.
5. The support of student evaluation is a tangible sign that faculty and administration recognise the importance of student involvement in shaping the institution's educational goals and practices.

The foregoing contributions provided a theoretical framework for this study. They also helped to give direction to the development of the instrument used.

Teacher evaluation refers to a periodic evaluation of teachers' performance. It involves a systematic gathering and analysis of information, on the basis of which decisions are taken regarding the effectiveness, efficiency and/or competence of the teacher in realising set professional goals and the desire of the school to promote effective learning. Such evaluation can be seen to have two broad purposes namely:

Formative Purposes – when results of such evaluation are used to improve classroom instruction, student learning, and to foster professional growth of the teacher.

Summative Purposes – when results of such evaluation are used for administrative/personnel decisions like promotion, salary increase, demotion, dismissal, awards and/or meeting public/government accountability demands (Gold, 2001).

Certainly the issue with teacher evaluation, from the available literature, is not whether it is necessary or should be done or not. The concerns with the practice are largely who should do it, for what purpose, and by what means? (Gardener and Milton, 2002). Jackson (1998) identifies nine approaches to teacher evaluation, namely: classroom observation, students' ratings, student achievement, peer-rating, self-rating, teacher interview, parents' rating, competency tests, and indirect measures. Studies concerned with measures of teachers' teaching competences have usually employed some of these approaches (Iyamu, 1998; Otote, 2004).

PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Maiwada (2001) presses the view that the inability of stakeholders in education to evaluate the standard of classroom teaching has contributed to the falling standard of education in Nigeria. Students are stakeholders in education. The implication here is that if students' evaluation of instruction is, as a rule, made a part of evaluative process, instructional improvement in schools could result. Should students evaluate classroom teaching and for what purpose? Investigation of the views of Nigerian University lecturers on these is the orbit of concern of this study.

Haefele (1992) and Darling-Hammond, Wise and Peace (1983) state that there are really many questions about the reliability, validity and utility of student evaluation of teachers, especially when they are for personnel decision and other summative purposes. Whether the situation in Nigerian Universities is the same as other parts of the world is also part of the concern of this study.

Isiaka (1998) shows that lecturers in selected Colleges of Education in Ghana and Kenya accepted the idea of students evaluating their classroom effectiveness. Smith and Anderson (2003) also found out that teachers in most American Colleges are disposed to student evaluation. The lecturers' acceptance cuts across gender (males and females). Isiaka's work emphasises the use of student evaluation for formative purposes only. In his study, teachers' opinions were not

dependent on gender, but on seniority (teaching experience), as more experienced lecturers were found to show more preference for student rating of teaching effectiveness than their junior counterparts. Whether this is true of Nigerian University lecturers is the focus of this study. The findings of this study are expected to add to existing knowledge in the area of the use of student rating of teaching effectiveness for summative purposes.

Jackson (1998) revealed that teachers in their perception of students evaluation of teachers did not differ on the basis of gender, location of school, academic attainment, teaching experience, and teaching subjects, under both formative and summative purposes in selected American universities.

Thus, schools and teachers in developed nations of the world like the United States, Canada and Great Britain have recognised the role of teacher evaluation by students and have harnessed the immense importance and contributions of this exercise for the good of the school systems and the teaching profession. Students are the direct beneficiaries of instruction, and given that they spend a great deal of time with teachers, they can offer useful inputs in identifying flaws during instruction and ways of remediation. These, they can do in spite of their seeming immaturity or irresponsibility. In Nigeria, however, the practice of teacher evaluation by students has not received much emphasis, and hence this study.

THE PROBLEM

The involvement of students in the evaluation of their lecturers' teaching effectiveness is seen as a practical demonstration of democracy in education. It is not in doubt that students are always able to provide a lot more information on their lecturers' teaching than would their Head of Department or Dean of Faculty. In Nigeria, universities lack effective systems of mentoring. A graduate assistant employed starts teaching immediately without being attached to more qualified and experienced professors to understudy (Nwadiani, 1999). Besides, a majority of lecturers, especially those of senior lecturer and below ranks are more like businessmen-lecturer. They spend more time outside the university engaged in other activities to earn additional money. Though this is justified considering the poor remuneration of university lecturers in the country, the negative impact this practice has on the quality of teaching cannot be glossed over. One of the ways to make them become more serious with their teaching is to subject them to summative evaluation by the students. The questions that are germane here in this regard are

How do Nigerian University lecturers perceive students' evaluation of their teaching effectiveness when the purposes are formative and summative? Will rank influence the perception of Nigerian University lecturers of students' evaluation of their teaching? The study aimed to answer the following questions:

- How do Nigerian university lecturers perceive students' evaluation of their teaching effectiveness.
- How do Nigerian university lecturers perceive students' evaluation of their teaching effectiveness when the purposes are formative and summative.

HYPOTHESES

The following hypotheses were tested in this study.

1. The mean score of Nigerian university lecturers on the student evaluation questionnaire who perceive the importance of students' evaluation of their teaching will not be significantly less than 50 per cent.

2. There will be no significant difference between junior and senior lecturers' perception of the importance of students' evaluation of their teaching.
3. The university lecturers' perception of the importance of student evaluation of their teaching will not differ significantly when the purposes of evaluation are (i) formative and (ii) summative.

The purposes of this study therefore are to verify the foregoing hypotheses as a basis for encouraging this practice in Nigerian Universities in order to improve the quality of teaching

PROCEDURES

The study employed a survey design. It sought to elicit the opinions of Nigerian university lecturers on students' evaluation of their teaching effectiveness. Two hundred lecturers made up of 100 junior (from Graduate Assistant to lecturer I) and 100 senior (from senior lecturer to professor) were randomly selected from five public universities in Nigeria.

The instrument for data collection was a questionnaire made up of 20 items. Items 1-10 were on the general need for student evaluation; 11-15 were on formative purposes; and 15-20 were on summative purposes on student evaluation. These items are (1) The idea of students evaluating their lecturers is acceptable (2) Students are mature and responsible to evaluate their lecturers (3) Students possess good value-judgment to evaluate their lecturers (4) Lecturers will be more prepared for their teaching (5) Lecturers will be more regular and punctual to class (6) Lecturer-student relationships will be improved (7) Lecturers will be more committed to their job (8) Lecturers will be more disciplined generally (9) Feedback on student evaluation helps lecturers to improve on their teaching (10) Lecturers will be more innovative in their teaching (11) Feedback on students' evaluation helps lecturers to improve on their teaching (12) Results of student evaluation are needed to improve classroom instruction (13) Results of student evaluation are used to improve students learning (14) Results of student evaluation are used to foster professional growth of lecturers (15) Student evaluation reports help lecturers to evaluate themselves. (16) Results of student evaluation are needed for administrative decisions (17) Student evaluation results are used for the promotion of lecturers (18) Such results are needed for salary increase for lecturers (19) Student evaluation results are needed to select the best teachers for award in the faculty (20) Results of student evaluation are used for decisions on lecturers' retention.

The questionnaire had a four-point Likert scale response pattern. These were: Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree and were weighted 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively. The instrument had a reliability coefficient of 0.61. The data collected were analysed using the Z-test of proportion between population and sample means, and Z-test of significant difference between two independent means. All tests were carried out at the 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS

The results of testing the three hypotheses posed in this investigation are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. A Z-test analysis for hypotheses one, two and three

Category	Sample (N)	Sample Mean (X)	Hypothesised Mean	Standard deviation	Calculated Z	Critical Z	p
Hypothesis One	200	41.3	50	3.09	2.18	1.96	
Hypothesis Two							
Junior Lecturers	100	39.2		3.11	2.41	1.96	>0.05
Senior Lecturers	100	53.8		2.23			
Hypothesis Three							
Formative purpose	200	51.6		3.14	2.01	1.96	>0.05
Summative purpose	200	39.5		3.67			

Examination of data in Table 1 shows that the calculated z is greater than the critical z . As a result, the first null hypothesis is rejected. Thus, the mean score of Nigerian university lecturers who perceive the importance of student evaluation is significantly less than 50 per cent. This implies that the majority of lecturers do not perceive the need for student evaluation. Their negative disposition to this practice may be explained by the views of Eble (1974) that faculty members in most institutions are skeptical of student evaluation because they might be detrimental to their career. Furthermore, according to Eble (1974), while many institutions shy away from formalising the means by which a faculty teacher's teaching competence is judged, others are reluctant in giving students a voice in the process. This finding is particularly a confirmation of the views of Cross (2002) that student evaluation does little general good and some particular harm. According to Cross, faculty anxieties on this point are not precisely clear, for the critics who are most dubious about general impact are often very sensitive to the particular harms student ratings can inflict. The majority of Nigerian university lecturers probably belong to this category of critics. In another view, Richmond (2003) stated that student evaluation might arouse unhealthy competition among faculty members. This may have influenced the perception of Nigerian university lecturers, a majority of whom did not see the need for student evaluation.

Analysis of data in Table 1, under hypothesis two, indicates that there is a significant difference in the perception of junior and senior categories of Nigerian university lecturers with respect to student evaluation. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected. The result is a little surprising because junior lecturers are probably apprehensive of their educational and professional inadequacies that may be revealed by student evaluation. Many studies including Urevbu (1997) and Imogie (2000) have reflected on the decay in Nigeria's education system to the extent that Nigerian undergraduates are merely certificated and not truly educated. Poor preparation of graduate students as teachers portends danger for Nigerian universities because the actual achievement of a university does not rise above the level of classroom performance (Clifford, 1999).

On the other hand, the senior categories of lecturers must have been better disposed to student evaluation (with a mean score of 53.8 as against 39.2 for the junior category) because of their experience and qualification. While a majority of them (72%) hold a PhD, majority of the junior lecturers (64%) do not. These senior lecturers are probably more confident, focused, purposeful and methodological in their instructional delivery, compared to the junior lecturers whose teaching has been characterised by aimlessness (Kilpatrick, 1997). They were probably less apprehensive of and sensitive to the particular harm that student ratings can inflict.

The result of the data analysed in Table 1, under hypothesis three, indicates that there is a significant difference in the lecturers' perception of the importance of student evaluation when it is meant for formative and summative purposes. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected. With a mean of 51.6 for formative purposes and 39.5 for summative purpose, it suggests that the university lecturers would accept student evaluation in as much as it is meant to serve a formative purpose and not for summative purposes.

Isiaka (1998) had reported that college teachers in Ghana and Kenya accept student evaluation. The study also showed that while the acceptance cut across gender, emphasis was on the use of such student evaluation for formative purposes only. The result of the present study must be a reflection of the lecturers' anxieties about the use of such student evaluation to make particular administrative decisions on their career. Where student evaluation contributes to decisions on promotion, demotion, dismissal, salary increase and awards (Gold, 2001), lecturers tend to be more sensitive to the harm that such practice could inflict on their career. However, such anxieties seem to be alleviated if lecturers are convinced that the evaluation results are meant to help them assess their own teaching and work to improve on it. This is more likely to be true of the junior

lecturers. Senior lecturers, especially the professors, tend to be less sensitive to the harm of student evaluation by virtue of their qualification and experience and the fact that they have reached the pinnacle of their career. They are likely to advocate student evaluation as a means of improving teaching and promoting the quality of university education in Nigeria. This finding agrees with Darling Hammond, Wise and and Peace(1983), Haeefe(1992) and Joshua(1998).

By endorsing student ratings of teachers for formative purposes, Nigerian university lecturers are invariably recognising the unique contributions that students as stakeholders in the educational system, can make towards fostering the professional growth of teachers, improving classroom instruction, and also serving other formative purposes. The negative attitude of lecturers toward the use of students' evaluation of their teaching effectiveness for summative purposes is an issue to worry about. These authors believe that the use of students' rating of their teachers may not be totally useless in taking some administrative decisions or serving other summative purposes. If lecturers know in advance that their career advancement depends, in part, on the ratings by students, the chances are that they will sit up to render effective teaching.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From the findings of this study, the following conclusions seem warranted.

1. Nigerian university lecturers generally have a low perception of the need for student evaluation. They are likely to be apprehensive and sensitive when this practice is introduced into the system.
2. Nigerian university lecturers at the lower level show low acceptance of student evaluation compared with their senior counterparts. These junior lecturers are likely to resent this practice.
3. Nigerian university lecturers are more accepting of student evaluation for formative purposes than for summative purposes.

The study recommends that students' evaluation of classroom teaching should be made mandatory and conducted regularly in Nigerian universities as teachers, students and indeed the university system will benefit from such evaluation. Student evaluation of teaching effectiveness is often criticised as lacking reliability, validity and generalisability due largely to the fact that instruments in use have no universal criterion of effective teaching. Now, there is an urgent need in Nigeria for experts to develop and publicise validated instruments for evaluation of teaching and teachers, not only by students but all other stakeholders in teacher evaluation.

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