EFFECT OF STUDENT EVALUATIONS OF LECTURERS ON TEACHING AND LEARNING EFFECTIVENESS (PERSPECTIVES OF CHINHOYI UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY STUDENTS IN ZIMBABWE)

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ABSTRACT

Whether students' evaluations of teaching result in effective teaching and learning is a contentious issue for some time. The study was sparked by the need to examine perceptions of students towards evaluations of lecturers. The study was also triggered by the necessity to establish impact of student evaluations on teaching and learning effectiveness at Chinhoyi University. In order to fulfil this objective, case study descriptive research design was adopted. The population of the study composed of Chinhoyi University students particularly from School of Entrepreneurship and Business Management. The sample composed sixty-seven students undertaking E-Business course. The research employed stratified sampling since the course is undertaken by different faculties. Data was gathered using semi-structured and unstructured questionnaires. Findings of the study confirmed that the adoption of student evaluations on lecturers had no significant impact in terms of improvement in teaching and learning. Therefore, the study recommends the university to use multiple methods of evaluating lecturers' teaching. Secondly, evaluation of lecturers should be conducted during the semester and not left at the end of it, in order to have positive impact on teaching and learning.

Keywords: Student, Evaluation, Lecturers.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The concept of student evaluations of teaching has been a controversial issue for a long period of time. Although students are asked for their feedback, it is difficult to conclude that instructors use that feedback to improve teaching (Blair and Noel, 2014). Ideally, student feedback has great potential to improve teaching if faculty is motivated to utilize such evaluations to improve teaching (Yao and Gray, 2005). At independence in 1980 the country had solely University of Zimbabwe as the only institute providing higher education. The university was failing to fulfil demand from students in terms of vacancies to undertake various degree programs from high school leavers. Supply was exceeding demand for students. Accordingly, the government realized the necessity to devolve higher education by establishing other private and state-owned universities in order to cope with demand by increasing the supply side of education. Even though access to education improved significantly due to various empowerment and affirmative policies by the government, there emerged quality related challenges by these institutions. With an enduring endeavor to provide education for all policy, the Zimbabwean government established ZIMCHE in 2006 with

the mandate to guarantee and sustain quality. ZIMCHE is the quality assurance agency of Zimbabwe tertiary education system. The council regulates the determination and maintenance of standards of teaching, examinations, academic qualifications, and research in institutions of higher learning. Due to prevailing macro-economic challenges as evidenced by inflation, cash crisis, sanctions, recession, Covid 19 pandemic and slow economic growth, the Zimbabwean government reduced its spending on higher educational sector. Reduction of government spending on higher education is a global trend but is more pronounced in Africa. However, the government anticipates institutions to be quality oriented and as well focus on innovation and industrialization to contribute to economic development through resource mobilization. To be specific, student evaluations of teaching have been used globally and in Zimbabwe in particular to maintain quality in high education by institutions and by ZIMCHE. Universities were instructed to establish quality assurance directorates in order to spearhead and supervise the quality assurance agenda at institutional level. Chinhoyi University of Technology was exemplary in establishing the department. However, it should be observed and realized that the implementation of students' evaluations as a quality tool is not a walk in the park since it is fraught with several challenges from the perspectives of administration, students and lecturers. The purpose of this study is to establish the impact of student evaluations on effective teaching and student learning. Most universities are embracing student evaluations in order to fulfil quality demands yet their impact on teaching and learning is unknown.

Traditionally, Chinhoyi University of Technology among others, have been using manual-based student evaluations of lecturers. Student evaluations were prepared in the form of questionnaires requesting students to rate lecturers on a likert scale. Students would assess several aspects of teaching ranging from course content to specific behaviors and practices. However, the manual system is being phased out since it is costly, time consuming and tiresome. Madu and Kueri (1993) outline reasons which make such questionnaires unsuitable for promotion, tenure, or salary increment. For instance, they can lead lecturers to adopt harmful short-term strategies under the pretext of pleasing students. Considering such challenges, Chinhoyi University of Technology has recently adopted online student evaluations which are considered anonymous, fast, and convenient to administer. The other advantages of online evaluations over paper-based systems include rapid dissemination of results, reduced costs, ease of reaching representative samples and the ability to validate data during collection (Cooper, 2000).

At most universities, lecturers are evaluated using student evaluations, peer evaluations and performance appraisals. Student evaluation on lecturers is the predominant method of lecturers' assessment in terms of teaching effectiveness. Student ratings are applied for formative, diagnostic, and summative purposes. Nevertheless, most students are developing apathy and reluctance in participating in them. This suggests that most lecturers may not be appraised at the end of the semester. In rare cases whereby lecturers are evaluated by students, feedback is hardly updated to the respective lecturers. Yet if they are properly administered, they serve as a litmus test for the lecturers to improve their teaching and enhance learning by students.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Recently, there has been a substantial increase in universities that award degrees and this has altered the global higher educational outlook (Altbach *et al.,* 2009). This development has

worsened competition in the industry. Most governments reduced their expenditures on higher education, forcing universities to differentiate themselves. Differentiation of universities with regards to service delivery is now quite common. Universities are now becoming cost conscious, innovative and entrepreneurial with regards to strategies and programs (Longanecker, 2016; Macgregor, 2015). Students' evaluation of lecturer performance had been a fundamental instrument and yet controversial tool in the quest to improve teaching quality nowadays (Spoorens and Mortelmans, 2006). Though they are widely used by most universities, their impact to teaching and learning is quite controversial. Nowadays, universities are faced with the dilemma of how to maintain educational quality they offer under competitive environments, how to cope with budget cuts and increased enrolments. This is evident by graduate unemployability since the skills production in universities does not match labour market demands or development needs. Due influence of globalization, most universities lecturers are faced with the problem of improving teaching in order to fulfil the anticipations of different students (Chireshe, 2011 and Merrit, 2008). The obligation for transparency and accountability with regard to the quality of teaching is now an important issue in higher education these days (Coaldrake & Stedman, 1998; Ramsden, 1998; Wilson *et al;* 1997).

In order to maintain quality standards, institutions are required to establish quality assurance systems whose main objectives are quality assurance, accountability and improvement (Martin and Stella, 2007). In order to uphold quality standards, lecturers are now being evaluated by their students at the end of most semesters. This is done by several universities across the world. Nevertheless, the student ratings of instruction in higher education are not considered a recent phenomenon (Spoorens and Mortelmans, 2006). Literature proved that student ratings have been applied in higher education for a relatively long period of time and this has provoked pronounced discussions pertaining to their usefulness (Sulong, 2016). These evaluations of performance by lecturers was introduced around 1915 (Wachtel, 1915). The performance of lecturers is one of the most important aspects of student ratings that profoundly influence student satisfaction and loyalty, besides enhancing university image (Helgesen & Nesset, 2007). Student evaluation of teaching has been a lucrative area of interest to several researchers in the USA, UK, Canada and other European countries (Hejase *et al.*, 2013).

According to Stroebe (2016), the administration of students' evaluations on their lecturers is quite an old practice and has been used to inform lecturers about the effectiveness of their teaching as observed by students. Chikazinga (2011) observed that student evaluations of lecturers dated back to the 15th Century at the University of Bologna in Italy when lecturers were being remunerated according to their teaching capabilities based on students' evaluations. There is another school of thought which advocates that informal student evaluations started around 1960s by enterprising college students. Since then, they are widely applied by almost all universities of the world as source of information for the evaluation of teaching performance of their lecturers. The use of student evaluations to evaluate lecturers' performance has attracted pronounced attention with regard to their reliability and validity (Kogan, 2011). Traditionally, universities and colleges evaluate teaching performance of lectures using various methods, for instance classroom observation, student assessment, student pass rate, self-rating, peer rating, parents rating, and other secondary means (Richardson, 2005). There are other several methods to evaluate teaching effectiveness, for example online questionnaires, peer review, class observation, and student-drop out (Slade & McConville, 2006). University lecturers had been evaluated using multiple data

sources such as portfolios, walk throughs, peer assessment, self-assessment, and senior teacher assessments (Stronge, 2006). Out of these, student evaluations of teaching, though involved in controversy, has gained widespread popularity globally as a basic means of assessing teaching in universities and colleges (Chazinga, 2019). They remain the most frequently used tools in the higher education in order to measure how well courses are being taught, despite problems regarding their validity (Samaian and Noor, 2012). Validity relates to ability and accuracy of student ratings to measure competence of teaching by lecturers. Nowadays, student evaluations are considered the most, if not the only influential measure of teaching effectiveness.

Student evaluations of teaching fulfils three main objectives in higher education (a) enhancing teaching quality (b) providing information for performance appraisals systems, for instance tenure or promotional decisions, and (c) providing evidence of institutional accountability. There are several other benefits of student ratings on their lecturers. For instance, one fundamental objective of such evaluations is to provide information and feedback to management regarding performance of teaching in order to reflect and make essential improvements in future (Samaian and Noor, 2012). As lecturers teach daily in the lecture rooms, they should understand how the adoption of effective teaching methods are regarded by students (Chuan and Heng, 2013). In addition, student evaluations of lecturers performs two more additional functions of developing professional practice and holding universities and lecturers to account, which inevitably leads to improved performance. Extant literature has revealed that the accomplishment of learning institutions in the 21st century is assessed with regards to the performance of their academic staff (Fernandez, 2018). These days, student evaluations on lecturers are some of the most argumentative measures, but however they are extensively applied in order to evaluate the effectiveness of learning and teaching in the higher education (Mawere, 2018). Student ratings are used as a diagnostic tool to assess teaching effectiveness. Mart (2017) argues that students' ratings should not be used to modify teaching practices but improve course structure and content.

Student evaluations on lecturers in universities have been prompted by the necessity for performance management systems, quality assurance and demands for student satisfaction (Spooren. Brockx, & Mortelmans. 2013). Students are regarded as relevant stakeholders in terms of getting insights about the quality of teaching since "the opinions of those who eat at the dinner should be considered if we want to know how it tastes" (Seldin, 1993:40). As key stakeholders, they have perspectives of lecturer performance due to direct interaction. The significant benefit of student ratings is on feedback on lecturers in order to improve content of their courses and provide their students with improved learning experience (Speaking of Teaching, 1979). Most importantly, gathering students' feedback and evaluation at the end of every semester is considered to be valuable for the lecturer's growth and development. Previous studies conducted by Suriyati & Wan (2011) confirmed that several universities globally implement student ratings whereby they express their comments and opinions about their lecturers without fear of repercussions. Related studies by Christopher and Shane (2007) testified that participants in their study regarded students' evaluations as necessary. However, they observed that lecturers who were awarded the highest ratings were not necessarily the most effective lecturers. While student evaluations are the most common measure of effective teaching, their use as an indicator of teaching effectiveness is quite questionable. Indeed, it is fundamental for academic institutions to know students' opinions about their lecturers as it provides an opportunity to define students' needs. By paying attention to teaching methods and related outcomes, students' evaluation plays a critical role in improving the

climate of learning and teaching (Speaking of Teaching, 1997). However, some researchers have argued that feedback provided by students' evaluations does not effectively promote change in lecturers' teaching performance. Worse still, there is limited evidence in studies to confirm that student evaluation of teaching guarantees course quality and improved teaching. Kwan (2002) summed up the arguments against student evaluations especially for making personnel decisions basing on four view points; firstly, they are an inappropriate measure of teaching effectiveness since students lack the expertise and maturity to judge performance of lecturers, secondly, the instruments are biased and influenced by situational factors irrelevant to teaching, thirdly, they are quite harmful to academic quality and standards, fourthly, the instruments contain items that are considered subjective, vague, and ambiguous.

The major problem with assessing effectiveness of evaluation of teaching by students is that there are no widely accepted guiding principles to define what actually constitute to effective teaching. The student evaluations of teaching have been found to relate negatively to deep learning approaches. Lecturers who promote surface learning tend to be awarded higher ratings compared to those who prefer deep learning approach. In deep learning students use higher order cognitive skills to analyse, synthesize, solve problems and think meta- cognitively in order to construct long-term understanding. Deep learning promotes understanding, discovery learning, construction of knowledge by students and application to real life. Whereas surface learning involves tacit acceptance of information, memorization and rote learning. Gezgin (2017) observed that student evaluations of teaching are normally used for summative purposes and usually implemented at the end of the semester. Due to that, it is difficult for them to improve teaching of courses unless they are implemented during the semester.

2.1 Research Objective

To establish the effect of student evaluations on lecturers and teaching and learning effectiveness.

2.2 Research Question

What is the effect of student evaluations on lecturers and teaching and learning effectiveness?

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The research adopted pragmatism research philosophy and mixed methods paradigm was used. The study used case study descriptive design. Target population at Chinhoyi University of Technology on year 2020 were 10500 students of which 8995 were undergraduate and 1505 were post-graduate students. This study adopted stratified-random sampling technique. Basically, to stratify means to classify or separate people into distinct groups according to known characteristics, for instance income, education, sex, position or ethnic background. Stratified sampling is a probability sampling technique whereby the entire population is divided into multiple mutually exclusive but homogenous strata, then select final elements disproportionately from each stratum. Data was collected from sixty-seven students undertaking pursuing E-business course and other 3.2 students who completed attachment program. Data was gathered using semi- structured questionnaires and interviews.

4.0 RESULTS

4.1 Response Rate

Table 4.1 below shows the response rate as deduced form questionnaires returned versus those administered.

Table 4.1: Response rate

Item	**Percentage/number**
Questionnaires issued	80
Returned	60
Screened out	2
Effective number	58
Absolute response rate as a percentage	75%
Effective response rate	73%
Interviewees	15
Interviews accepted and conducted	10
Interview's acceptance rate	67%

Table 4.1 show that 80 questionnaires were issued out and 60 were returned back. Two questionnaires were screened out because they were incomplete in some sections, so effectively 58 questionnaires were used for the study. The absolute response rate was 75% and the effective response rate was 73% which indicates a high response rate. In terms of interviews 15 people were invited and 10 accepted the interviews giving an acceptance rate of 67%. The response rate was quite positive to produce reliable findings which can be generalized to the entire institute.

4.2 Reliability Test

Reliability test measures how reliable is the instrument used and the data collected.

Table 4.2: Reliability statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.891	36

The results of reliability test on table 4.2 shows Cronbach's Alpha index of 0.891 this means that the instrument and data were reliable therefore, further tests can be done. Acceptable Cronbach's Alpha index must range between 0.7 and 1. The general rule of thumb is that a Cronbach's alpha of .70 and above is good, .80 and above is better, and .90 and above is best.

Hypothesis testing

It involves testing the relationship between variables. The main test done was regression test using linear modelling, Anova test and Beta coefficients analysis.

4.3 Regression test

This measures the relationship between independent and dependent variables of the study.

Table 4.3 Regression model summary

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.297[a]	.088	.072	.785
2	.402[b]	.161	.131	.760

a. Predictors: (Constant), Used for grading purposes in form of tests and examinations (Summative function).
b. Predictors: (Constant), Used for grading purposes in form of tests and examinations (Summative function). Enhance pedagogical teaching skills of the lecturer.
c. Dependent Variable: Student evaluations have an impact on teaching and learning at Chinhoyi University of Technology.

From table 4.14 the R value for model 1 is 0.297 and for model two is 0.402. All these two are below very far from two. The R square for model one is at 0.88 and for model two is at 0.161 and they are very far from one. The adjusted R square for model one is at 0.072 and for model 2 is at 0.131 and these two are also very far from one. It means there is weak relationship between student evaluation of lecturers and improvement in teaching and learning. Study findings confirms weak correlation between student evaluations of teaching and effective teaching at Chinhoyi University of Technology.

4.4 Anova test

It measures the relationship between variables using the sum of squares, degrees of freedom and mean square values. The higher the residual of the mean square the stronger the relationship.

Table 4.4Anova test

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	3.346	1	3.346	5.426	.023[b]
	Residual	34.533	56	.617		
	Total	37.879	57			
2	Regression	6.111	2	3.055	5.290	.008[c]
	Residual	31.768	55	.578		
	Total	37.879	57			

a. Dependent Variable: Student evaluations have an impact on teaching and learning at Chinhoyi University of Technology.
b. Predictors: (Constant), Used for grading purposes in form of tests and examinations (Summative function).
c. Predictors: (Constant), Used for grading purposes in form of tests and examinations (Summative function). Enhance pedagogical teaching skills of the lecturer.

Based on results from table 4.15 the mean square for model one is at 0.617 and for model two is at 0.578. Though these means are above 0.5 and above significant values of 0.023 and 0.008 respectively, they are far away from one hence the relationship is weak between student evaluation of lecturers and improvement in teaching and learning. This strongly confirms that the adoption of student evaluations of teaching has no significant impact on teaching effectiveness at Chinhoyi University of Technology. This is attributed to the fact that once they are completed by students, feedback is rarely provided to the respective lectures except them being achieved. Globally, researchers still question the usefulness of student evaluations to universities. The above research findings are consistent with Murray (1997) who concluded that student evaluations do not lead to improved teaching. Yunker and Yunker (2003) found negative relationship between student evaluation and student learning. Students cannot evaluate issues that are outside their experience like pedagogy.

4.5 Analysis of Beta Coefficients

It analyses the beta coefficients to see how closer they are to one so that the relationship between variables can be determined.

Table 4.5: Beta Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.305	.567		4.067	.000
	Used for grading purposes in form of tests and examinations (Summative function).	.354	.152	.297	2.329	.023
2	(Constant)	2.740	.583		4.696	.000
	Used for grading purposes in form of tests and examinations (Summative function).	.461	.155	.387	2.975	.004
	Enhance pedagogical teaching skills of the lecturer	-.214	.098	-.285	-2.188	.033

a. Dependent Variable: Student evaluations have an impact on teaching and learning at Chinhoyi University of Technology.

From table 4.16 model one shows an unstandardized beta coefficient of 0.354 and a standardised beta coefficient of 0.297 which shows a weak relationship between student evaluation of lecturers and improvement in teaching and learning. Then model two shows an unstandardized beta coefficient of 0.461 and a standardised beta coefficient of 0.387 which shows a weak relationship between student evaluation of lecturers and improvement in teaching and learning. On model two the other variable is on the negative, the variable is student evaluation of lecturers by students enhance pedagogical teaching skills of the lecturer, which confirms a weak negative relationship as far as that variable is concerned. Related studies undertaken by Mart (2017) established that student evaluations of teaching cannot be used as a sole measure of effective teaching. Nevertheless, they provide diagnostic feedback to lecturers to improve their teaching. The study further recommends universities to carry out regular surveys with students in order to identify

challenges and areas of improvement. Whilst students are well- placed to evaluate aspects of teaching, there is compelling evidence that student evaluations are tenaciously connected to teaching effectiveness since they are biased by issues like ethnicity, gender, or instructor attractiveness (Stark, 2016). Further studies carried out by Hejase *et al.* (2013) concluded that students perceived evaluations as biased by several factors and therefore are an inadequate measure of teaching effectiveness. Ultimately, they are hardly valid and reliable. Interviews with students revealed that students acknowledged that evaluations may not lead to improved teaching and learning since they are not knowledgeable about content and pedagogical skills. More so, students expressed that student evaluations are generally biased and therefore they cannot be used to improve teaching. However, some students stated that student evaluations are valid and reliable instruments to measure teaching effectiveness.

5.0 DISCUSSION

Rotated Component Matrix showed that student evaluations on lecturers were biased, subjective, and unreliable. Generally, students did not have adequate time to complete them due to other academic commitments. Furthermore, students lacked adequate knowledge to evaluate teaching by lecturers. Worse still, the study revealed that student evaluations were influenced by several variables like course characteristics. More so, student ratings on lecturers were influenced by grade or mark expectations. Generally, students did not take evaluations seriously and students encountered technological challenges. In addition, students feared to be personally identified and victimized by lecturers. The study investigated the relationship between implementation of student evaluations and improved teaching and learning effectiveness at the university. Both Regression model and Anova test found a weak relationship between these variables. This suggests that there is weak correlation between implementation of student evaluations and teaching and learning effectiveness. Perceptions of students showed that they are not used to improve teaching and learning. This is consistent with current literature that confirms that student evaluations of teaching reflect student biases otherwise they are unreliable. They are imperfect indicators of teaching effectiveness. Therefore, using invalid and unreliable or biased student evaluations to make decisions about hiring and tenure is obviously harmful to both students and faculty alike. They are most likely a reflection of student's satisfaction with a course which is influenced by many factors that are unrelated to teaching effectiveness (Freishtat, 2016). Student evaluations of teaching do not measure teaching effectiveness. Furthermore, they are influenced by several factors unrelated to teaching. "Student evaluations of teaching are imperfect at best and downright biased and unreliable at worst". (Stroebe, 2020)

5.1 CONCLUSIONS

It can be concluded that student evaluations on lecturers are subjective, unreliable, and invalid and biased. Besides lacking adequate knowledge about them, students at Chinhoyi University were reluctant to participate in them since they consider them to be irrelevant to improved teaching and learning environment. More so students feared reprisals and retaliations from lecturers in case they write negative comments. Chinhoyi University of Technology students face technological challenges in implementing online student evaluations of lecturers. The fact that students are hesitant to complete student evaluations on lecturers shows that there is poor communication and feedback among students, lecturers and administrative staff with regards to lecturers' ratings by

students. Student evaluation of lecturers are influenced by several extraneous factors which are not related to teaching thereby introducing bias. The study revealed a weak correlation between student evaluations of lecturers and teaching and learning effectiveness. This suggests that the adoption of student evaluations on lecturers have insignificant impact on improved teaching and learning.

The university is advised to regularly revise their instruments of student evaluations on lecturers such that they are objective, valid, reliable, and impartial. Additionally, the institute should communicate effectively to students regarding the purpose and objectives of administering lecturer evaluations in order to alleviate student their fears and misconceptions and have mutual understanding. In order for them to have formative, diagnostic, and summative role, student evaluations on lecturers should be implemented during the semester not the end of it as the current practice. Furthermore, student ratings should not be the sole and only measure of effective teaching but as part of a holistic assessment which includes peer assessments, observation, and self-assessments among others. The organization should adopt dialogue-based evaluations instead of quantitative methods of evaluations. Dialogue-based evaluations are more objective and developmental. They should conduct face to-face interviews with students as a way of evaluating teaching competence. The institute should involve and collaborate with students in developing instruments for evaluating lecturers. There should be effective consultation of all stakeholders including students, lecturers and administration in developing, implementing and evaluating lecturer ratings. The university should change the nature and format of student evaluations from being anonymous to being confidential in nature. The university is advised to implement technological awareness and training on all students, lecturers, and administrative staff on its new programs especially lecturer ratings. The university is encouraged to compare and benchmark its instruments with those of other universities in Zimbabwe and abroad in order to enhance teaching, learning, comparability, accountability, transparency, and competitiveness.

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