

SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDENT EVALUATION OF LECTURERS AT CHINHOYI UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY IN ZIMBABWE

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was explore the significance of students' evaluation of teaching at Chinhoyi University of Technology in Zimbabwe. In order to fulfil this objective, case study descriptive research design was adopted. The population of the study was composed of Chinhoyi University students particularly from School of Entrepreneurship and Business Management. The sample comprised of sixty seven students undertaking E-Business course. The research employed cluster sampling since the course was undertaken by different faculties. Data was gathered using semi-structured and unstructured questionnaires. Research findings confirm that student evaluations are useful in higher education for several purposes like quality assurance, improved interactions between students and lecturers, decision-making, and to enhance student teaching and learning environment. It can be concluded that student evaluations are useful assessment tool in universities. 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. Furthermore, university administrators and management should be trained on how to analyse and interpret student evaluations.

Keywords: Student, Evaluations, Teaching, Learning, Effectiveness.

1.0: INTRODUCTION

Students are key stakeholder group in higher education. Even though students' evaluation of teaching have long been used to evaluate teaching performance, their validity, reliability and usefulness have remained controversial due to conflicting empirical literature. Student Evaluations of Teaching (SET), also known as student ratings or course evaluations are widely used as a measure of teaching quality in universities. The results of student evaluations are important in understanding possible areas of further improvement by lecturers. Literature on student evaluations is quite widespread and controversial. This is caused by the fact that there are several definitions of student evaluation of teaching. Furthermore, teaching effectiveness is an elusive concept that is quite difficult to measure since it is multidimensional in nature. According to Iyamu and Aduwa (2005), student evaluations refer to periodic assessment of

lecturers' performance by students. The United Nations Educational and Scientific and Cultural Organization define student evaluation of teaching as;

“... the process of using student inputs concerning the general activity and attitude of teachers. These observations allow the overall assessors, the degree of conformity between student expectations and the actual teaching approaches of teachers. Student evaluations are expected to offer insights regarding the attitude in class of a teacher and/or the abilities of a teacher”. (Vlasceanu *et al.*, 2004:59-60).

Student ratings, are one of the most controversial techniques used to identify teaching effectiveness. Indeed, they are a generalized practice in almost every institution of higher education around the world. Their continued use in higher education for teaching and administrative purposes have been based on empirical research indicating that a well-constructed instrument can be considered a useful measure of teaching effectiveness (Kelly, 2012). For several decades, the outcome of students' evaluation of teaching effectiveness is considered a significant tool to measure the effectiveness of teaching quality (Spooren and Mortelmans, 2006). As such, they have since been embedded in the national and institutional quality assurance frameworks in higher educational sector to measure student experience. According to Morley (2014) student evaluations have been used on a voluntary basis in the United States of America since the 1920s, with increasing importance being put on them in the 1970s. These days, university faculties are held responsible for how well they serve student populations. Accordingly, it has become a common practice in universities to evaluate lecturers and grade them. To date, student evaluations have attracted significant attention in higher education due to the necessity for improvement in teaching, and for accountability purposes by universities.

The recent increase in degree-awarding institutions has intensified competition in the higher educational sector globally. This contributed to the considerable increase in student enrolment in universities leading to the adoption of semester system in universities in order to mobilize financial resources and improve access to education to majority of underprivileged students. Coupled with reduced government expenditure on higher education, institutions are enforced to differentiate themselves. Such differentiation entices universities to be entrepreneurial, cost-cutting, being innovative and quality oriented. Universities in Zimbabwe were recently advised to establish quality assurance directorates in order to spearhead the quality agenda in programs and teaching itself. Student evaluations of teaching are now being used to differentiate universities with regards to teaching. Nowadays, universities are also differentiating themselves in terms of tuition, quality assurance systems, infrastructure, and programs as well as how they are delivered.

Due to globalization and competition, most universities are concerned with building their reputation together with continuous improvement of the quality of education they offer to students. Universities are experiencing significant paradigm shift with regards to their relationships with students (Raza, Majid and Zia, 2010). That is why most universities are embracing technology. For instance during this Covid 19 pandemic most universities including Chinhoyi University of Technology embarked on virtual teaching using Virtual Learning Environment and Big Blue Button facilities. Aleomoni (1973) offers the following four arguments in support of student ratings. Firstly, students are the main sources of information about the learning environment including the lecturer's ability to motivate students for continued learning and creation of rapport. Secondly, students are the most logical evaluators of quality of teaching in terms of content. Thirdly, student ratings promote communication

between the lecturer and students. Such communication will lead to lecturer-student involvement and interaction. This inevitably improves the level of instruction. Fourthly, such student ratings can be used by other students for the selection of courses and instructors. That way, it gives room for excellence in instruction to be recognized and rewarded. Unquestionably, student evaluations provide important feedback to teachers, but their utilization to measure teaching effectiveness per se is still a bone of contention. Evaluation of lecturers is considered a fundamental aspect of the educational process since critical decisions concerning lecturers are derived from them. They are used for personnel decisions, improvement of teaching and selection of courses by students. Specifically, they are used for three main purposes, namely (a) improving teaching quality (b) determining the tenure and promotion of faculty, and (c) determine the institution's accountability (Zhang *et al.*, 2017). Kulik (2001) argued that they are used to assess quality of teaching and provide information to lecturers to enhance their teaching. These days, student ratings are generally used for administrative decision-making, curriculum development, informing students about specific courses to choose from as well as for quality assurance purposes.

It has been argued that evaluation in the higher education is a balancing act among control, quality assurance and public accountability (Williams *et al.*, 2016). In practice, the main functions of student evaluations has shifted from development of teaching to quality assurance in the previous decade (Spooren *et al.*, 2013). Prest and Gasevic (2016) argued that the purposes of student evaluations include the provision for diagnostic feedback for lecturers, measurement tool, and pedagogical research. The issue pertaining to whether students' evaluations leads to improved teaching and learning is quite argumentative. OECD (2015) states that lecturer evaluation serves two objectives (a) First, they develop the lecturers' own practice through identifying strengths and weaknesses for further career development, and (b) they are aimed at holding lecturers accountable for their performance in improving students learning. Indeed the voices of students have been expressed to be essential in providing positive change in the lecture rooms, since they provide vital information regarding the enhancement of teaching and learning (Quaglia & Corso, 2014). Student evaluations have been applied to both punish and reward lecturers in universities. Ede and Sam (2005) recommended that students' evaluations in universities should be mandatory and conducted regularly.

Most universities consider the improvement of teaching quality and effectiveness as their top priority. Consequently, universities understand that the general perception of quality of teaching is the principal reason students offer for selecting a college or university (Shar, Nair & Bennet, 2013). As lecturers teach daily in their respective lecturer rooms, they need to be assured how the implementation of effective teaching strategies and initiatives are conceived by students (Chuan and Heng, 2013). Student ratings are comprehensively used in the assessment of lecturer's tenure decisions, retention, promotion and job performance, but debate over their usage is centered over their reliability, validity, and the application of such data in assessing teaching performance (Rowan *et al.*, 2017). Even though student evaluations are considered cost effective, their validity and reliability are compromised since they are based on students' expectations of the lecturer (Van der Lans *et al.*, 2015). Aleomoni (1987) argued that students are too immature to evaluate the quality of teaching and their limited subject knowledge impairs their capacity to make judgments. Costin, Greenough and Menges (1971) suggests that the 'uses to which student ratings are put depend heavily on faculty confidence in their meanings'. Despite wide-ranging controversy, SET are generally viewed by several academics as important tool to improve teaching (Kogan, Schoenfeld-Teacher and Hellyer, 2011). On the side of students, they are the best way of acknowledging their misconceptions, correct them and guide their learning strategies (Benkirana *et al.*, 2019). Indeed, implementing

student evaluations is one way of interacting and collaborating with students. In the same context, students' unfulfilled expectations concerning course content, assessment and teaching styles are considered as critical as well as important source of negative assessments by students. Papanastasiou (1999) outlined five objectives of student evaluations, namely; (a) Universities grant diplomas and degrees to incompetent graduates, (b) State licensing bodies are not competent, (c) University training institutions recruit low quality and unqualified candidates (d) A large proportion of teacher training institutions have ineffective teacher training programs (e) Incompetent teaching leads to failure of students in examinations. Idaka *et al.* (2006) suggests that students' evaluation should be mandatory in universities since;

- a) Students' assessment as a criterion of effective teaching cannot be waived aside as invalid and irrelevant.
- b) Judging by the way higher education is operated and organized, students are the ones who observe and are well placed to measure teaching effectiveness.
- c) Lecturers have no choice as to whether they should be assessed by students or not.
- d) So far there is limited research that has been published invalidating the application of student assessments as a standard of measuring teaching effectiveness.

However, Mart (2017) argued that students' evaluations are used by universities for the following purposes;

- a) Students' feedback has been considered as a significant lecturer evaluation tool as it permits teachers to improve their teaching.
- b) Universities use them as important source of data for personnel decisions.
- c) Students also use them for the selection of courses and lecturers.
- d) Students' feedback is given substantial weight in quality assurance systems of universities since they are considered good indicators of effective teaching.
- e) Surveys provide important information to measure student satisfaction with lecturers and their teaching.

The justification of students' evaluation in universities originated from three perspectives, namely; (a) students who wanted to contribute to the development of teaching. (b) Administrators who were worried about good public relations and accountability and (c) lecturers who wanted to be promoted and tenured (Murray, 2005). Student evaluations of teaching have a profound effect on instructors' careers. Besides performing both formative and summative roles, student evaluations are used to measure student engagement and learning. Formative purpose is when evaluations are used to improve teaching, student learning, and promote professional growth of the lecturer. Summative function is when such evaluations are used for administrative purposes, for instance the promotion staff, salary increment, demotion, dismissal, awards or accountability demands. Indeed, students as recipients of instruction, are well- placed to evaluate teaching performance by virtue of their experiences and perceptions. Student ratings provide excellent insights into the current effectiveness of the lecturer 'out in the field'. When student evaluations are done regularly, the quality of educational experience will undoubtedly improve both for the lecturer and the student. In that context, students' expectations when undertaking a course greatly influences their perception of lecturer' evaluations. For instance, if students anticipate a distinction from a course, they can evaluate the respective lecturer highly and the converse is true. Considerable literature pertaining to student evaluations of teaching is not about their significance per se, but the extent to which they are valid, reliable, and whether they should be used in high stake decisions like promotion and tenure. Indeed, student evaluation constitute a valuable tool to enhance teaching and

learning outcomes (Kogan, Hellyer and Schoenfield-Tacher, 2010). Validity assesses the degree to which student evaluations truly reflect teaching performance of the lecturer. Widespread debate about student evaluations of teaching pertains to their contribution to effective teaching and learning. The truthfulness of anonymous students' evaluations is based on the supposition that by virtue of attending lectures, students observe the competences of their lecturers and they are likely to report truthfully about their performance (Hornstein, 2017). Without a doubt, students are better-placed to evaluate their comprehension, knowledge and motivation of the lecturer. They can as well judge, observe and rate qualities of effective teachers with regards to punctuality, enthusiasm and student engagement. Under ideal circumstances, if lecturers intend to improve their practice, they should offer their primary audiences the opportunity to provide feedback. This enables student students to feel engaged in their educational journey.

Research confirm that properly constructed lecturer evaluations have potential to provide reliable, valid and useful data for both faculty and administration. Marsh (1987) suggested that the measurement of student evaluations on lecturers show that they are reliable, multidimensional, reasonably valid, and uncontaminated by several sources of bias. Furthermore, they are considered useful by lecturers, students and administrators. Ensuring effectiveness of teaching sustains the core mission of universities and is critical to student development. Ultimately, students as customers, are the recipients of teaching, and therefore are well-placed to judge teaching effectiveness. Most studies confirm that university management in general have a positive orientation towards student evaluations and view them as useful source of information for personnel decisions (Campbell & Bozerman, 2008). Further research confirm that students in most universities are willing to participate constructively in lecturer evaluations. Cashin (1990) established that student ratings constitute the commencement of the instructors' journey towards improvement, not an end in itself. Student evaluation of teaching are normally used in the context where academics strive for constant improvement in the teaching of their courses. What is essential is to make follow-up on completed student evaluations in order to make the necessary improvements in teaching.

On a similar note, Murray (2020) observed that student evaluations are useful to assess characteristics that are evidently observable by students like keeping teaching hours, covering learning objectives, speaking fluently among others. On the other hand, students cannot assess clandestine issues like quality of assignments, instructor's knowledge of subject or academic standards. Critics argue that student evaluations are merely measures of student satisfaction and barely measure student learning. This gives credibility to the argument that student evaluations are not a true measure of lecturers' competence but of popularity and liking and therefore they should be applied cautiously on high stake decisions. Research undertaken by Chikazinga (2019) in Malawi recommended that student evaluations of teaching should be triangulated with other evaluation approaches when making administrative decisions such as promotion, demotion, dismissal, salary increase, and awards. Therefore SET should not be used as the only evidence of teaching effectiveness. Instead, they should be used as part of a holistic assessment tools that include peer assessments, review of teaching materials, and instructor self-reflections.

2.1 Research Objective

To examine the significance of student evaluation of teaching at Chinhoyi University of Technology

2.2 Research Question

What is the significance of student evaluation of teaching at Chinhoyi University of Technology?

2.3 Statement of the Problem

Student evaluations of teaching are applied to measure performance in several institutions of higher education throughout the world. There is abundant research that proves that feedback from student evaluations is effective to improve teaching. Recently, there has been growing ambivalence by Chinhoyi University students to participate in lecturers' evaluations. Research confirms that students' participation in lecturer evaluations in universities globally ranges between 30 to 50 per cent. The problem is serious since evaluations are considered valid if 80 per cent of students respond to them. This leads to failure by most lecturers to be evaluated by their students at the end of the semester thereby compromising the quality of teaching and learning. In an attempt to alleviate the problem, the university resorted to electronic students' evaluations, but the problem of student apathy still persists. The purpose of the study is to examine significance of student evaluation of teaching at Chinhoyi University of Technology in Zimbabwe.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The research applied pragmatism research philosophy since it was investigating the usefulness of student evaluation of teaching at Chinhoyi University of Technology in Zimbabwe. 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. The study adopted stratified sampling and later simple random sampling when picking respondents. 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 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1: Inferential Data Analysis

Since the data is adequate for factor analysis based on KMO test, therefore we proceed to analyse data using factor analysis.

4.1.1 Significance Of Students' Evaluations On Lecturers In Improving Teaching And Learning

This analyse the importance of students' evaluations on lecturers in an attempt to improve teaching and learning. Analysis was done using communalities, total variance explained, scree plot and rotated component matrix.

Table 4.1.2: Communalities on significance of students' evaluations on lecturers in improving teaching and learning

Communalities	Initial	Extraction
Student evaluations improve student learning	1.000	.899
They improve teaching effectiveness of lecturers	1.000	.786
They promote active student participation in teaching and learning	1.000	.852
They provide feedback on student learning	1.000	.832

Lecturers use evaluations to improve learning content for students	1.000	.595
They are used by the university administration purposes for lecturer promotion	1.000	.714
Used for transparency and accountability purposes	1.000	.628
For Quality Assurance purposes in universities	1.000	.866
They are used for transparency purposes	1.000	.789
To assist in decision-making by university management	1.000	.889
Enhance pedagogical teaching skills of the lecturer	1.000	.588
They improve interaction between lecturers and students	1.000	.692
Used for grading purposes in form of tests and examinations (Summative function).	1.000	.613
Used to improve teaching and learning process (formative function)	1.000	.756

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

All the variables on table 4.8 above have communalities that are high hence the variables are well represented.

Table 4.1.3: Total variance explained on significance of students' evaluations on lecturers in improving teaching and learning

Total Variance Explained

Component	Initial Eigen values			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	6.213	44.380	44.380	6.213	44.380	44.380	4.487	32.049	32.049
2	1.706	12.184	56.564	1.706	12.184	56.564	2.533	18.092	50.141
3	1.477	10.551	67.115	1.477	10.551	67.115	1.962	14.015	64.156
4	1.102	7.869	74.985	1.102	7.869	74.985	1.516	10.828	74.985
5	.870	6.215	81.200						
6	.689	4.919	86.119						
7	.604	4.311	90.430						
8	.368	2.631	93.060						
9	.315	2.248	95.308						
10	.275	1.962	97.270						
11	.184	1.311	98.581						
12	.103	.734	99.315						
13	.058	.414	99.729						
14	.038	.271	100.000						

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

From table 4.9, four components out of the fourteen constitute 74.958% of the cumulative variance. This means four components contributes much to the variance. These components best describe the significance of students' evaluations on lecturers in improving teaching and learning. These components have eigenvalues higher than 1 and their values are 6.213, 1.706, 1.477 and 1.102 respectively. Component one is more outstanding as it has the highest eigenvalue of 6.213 including a percentage of 44.38% alone of the total variance. Figure 4.1 below further illustrates this variance.

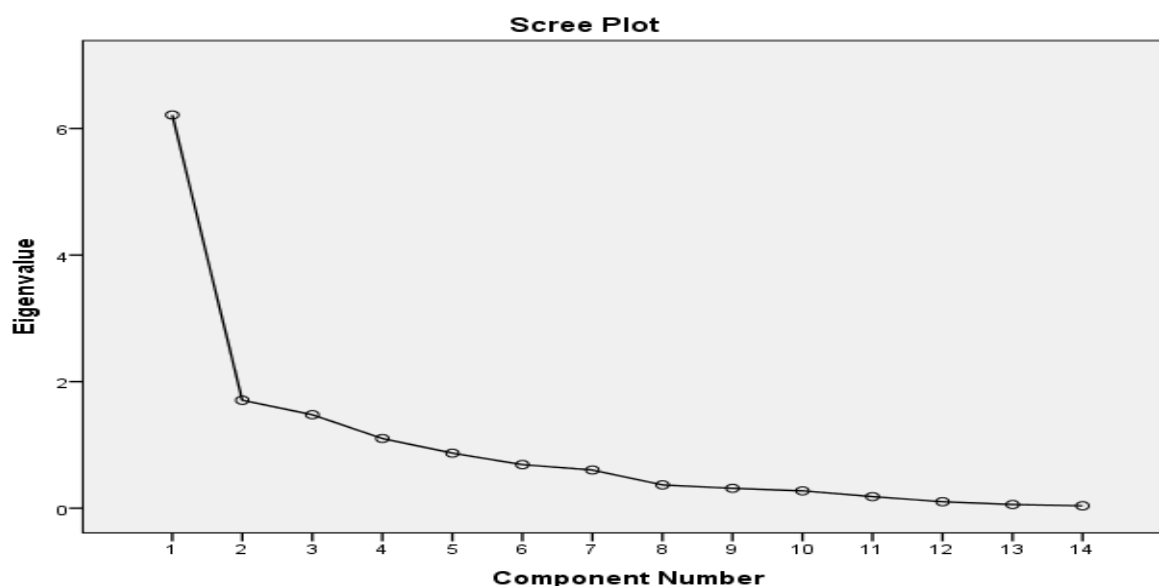


Figure 4.1: Scree plot on significance of students' evaluations on lecturers in improving teaching and learning

Table 4.1.4: Rotated component matrix on significance of students' evaluations on lecturers in improving teaching and learning

Rotated Component Matrix^a

	Component			
	1	2	3	4
• Student evaluations improve student learning	.097	.195	.066	.921
• They improve teaching effectiveness of lecturers	.672	.253	-.108	.508
• They promote active student participation in teaching and learning	.718	.494	.218	.213
• They provide feedback on student learning	.114	.556	.664	.264
• Lecturers use evaluations to improve learning content for students	.555	.498	.196	-.002
• They are used by the university administration purposes for lecturer promotion	-.033	-.081	.840	-.006
• Used for transparency and accountability purposes	.721	.305	.007	.121
• For Quality Assurance purposes in universities	.911	.104	-.114	.114
• They are used for transparency purposes	.821	.090	.283	-.161
• To assist in decision-making by university management	.623	.568	.000	-.421
• Enhance pedagogical teaching skills of the lecturer	.219	.663	.261	.180
• They improve interaction between lecturers and students	.106	.813	-.057	.129
• Used for grading purposes in form of tests and examinations (Summative function).	.349	.298	.631	-.060
• Used to improve teaching and learning process (formative function)	.771	.010	.387	.109

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalisation.

a. Rotation converged in six iterations.

From table 4.1.4 above, four variables are loaded strongly on these four components. Through the rotated component matrix, we are able to identify these variables. On component one the variable with the highest factor loadings has 0.911 and this variable is “For Quality Assurance purposes in Universities”. This means that when students evaluate their lecturers that information is used to improve quality of education to be received by students in future. Khamis and Tennant (2017) suggests that student evaluation of the teaching process is an essential quality assurance tool with the potential to give data that can be used to inform the development of courses and guidance of Instructors. On component two the highest factor loading is 0.813 and the variable is “They improve interaction between lecturers and students”. This means that after evaluation the interaction will improve because the lecturers will address issues raised by students and improve the quality of interaction with students. Then on component three the highest factor loading is 0.840 and the variable is “They are used by the university administration purposes for lecturer promotion”. This means these evaluations contribute to lecturers’ promotions as based by what the students said during evaluations. Then on component four the highest factor loading is 0.921 and the variable is “Student evaluations improve student learning”. This means that student learning in future will improve because the evaluations provide feedback for improvement by the lecturers.

Literature confirms that students perceive the process of collecting feedback from them regarding teaching to be useful and valid but they are not aware of how universities use the data. More so, they are not aware of the impact of the data on personnel decisions. Furthermore, most students are skeptical about how their input is used (Gravestock and Greenleaf, 2008). Student evaluations are considered to be one of important tools used by universities to strengthen quality of teaching, making employment decisions, and as feedback mechanism for professional development (Huber and Skedsmo, 2016). Generally, student’s evaluation should serve both accountability and improvement purposes. They provide lecturers with rich and valuable information for formative and summative purposes. Research findings are consistent with Kelly and Laurier (2012) who advocated that student evaluations serve three main purposes (a) formative function, whereby they provide feedback to improve teaching and course content (b) for student engagement and learning (c) summative or administrative function for tenure and staff promotion decisions. However, Gravestock and Greenleaf (2008) argue that student evaluations are mainly for summative rather than formative purposes. Mart (2017) argue that student evaluations became popular in universities due to the need for quality assurance systems. Responses from interviews with students confirmed that student evaluation are useful for administrative purpose, improved student learning, innovative teaching, self-reflection and improved relationships with students. The other respondent expressed that they are important for effective classroom management.

5.0 FINDINGS

Study findings revealed that student evaluation of teaching are used for quality assurance purposes. Secondly, they are used to enhance interaction and engagement with students by lecturers. They are used to collaborate with students in the learning process. Thirdly, student ratings are applied for administrative-decision making process especially for tenure and promotion. Most importantly, they are implemented to improve teaching and learning process at the university. Indeed, they promote active student participation in the learning process through feedback.

5.1 CONCLUSIONS

It can be concluded that student evaluation of teaching plays a fundamental role in terms of teaching and learning at the university. The study confirmed that student evaluations of teaching are widely used method of evaluating faculty performance in the lecturer-room. They play a significant role from a didactic, pedagogical, administrative and quality assurance perspective. They are also used for tenure, promotion and merit pay decisions of faculty members. Student evaluations are a useful tool to evaluate performance of lecturers and they are applied to enhance teaching and learning. Furthermore, they are valid measure of teaching performance. Student evaluations on lecturers are used for educational policy formulation, implementation and evaluation.

5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

The university is advised to continue administering student evaluations of teaching since they have positive impact on their core-business of teaching and facilitating student learning. The university should educate, induct, train and motivate their students to complete them. 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 university should communicate effectively to students regarding the purposes and objectives of administering lecturer evaluations in order to alleviate their fears and misconceptions. 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 university 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 university should involve 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. Once, they are administered there should be effective communication and feedback between students, lecturers and administrative staff. The institution is advised to 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 to all students, lecturers and administrative staff on its new programmes 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 and competitiveness.

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