

STUDENTS' EVALUATION OF TEACHING (SET): PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENTS FROM THREE TIERS OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Quality assurance and management have recently become topical issues of concerns in institutions of higher learning in Nigeria. Input by lecturers has also been seen as the corner stone of this quality assurance. Holistic evaluation of teaching quality that will cover both instructional delivery and research competencies, therefore, becomes imperative. Student evaluation of teaching effectiveness has been seen as a vital component of teaching quality but is a newcomer in Nigerian educational institutions. This study surveys higher education students' perception of introduction and use of SET in Nigerian tertiary institutions. 600 students comprising of 300 male and 300 female students in three tiers of higher institutions in Nigeria were sampled for the study. The study found that the students perceived SET in tertiary institutions as a way of improving instructional delivery. They were of the view that SET should be used for both formative and summative purposes. Students' gender, academic discipline and type of institution had no significant influence on their perception of SET.

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KEYWORDS: *teaching effectiveness; student evaluation of teachers; higher education; quality assurance*

INTRODUCTION

The movement away from the belief that the student is a passive receiver of knowledge and the marketing ideology of consumer being the best judge of quality form the basis for students evaluation of teaching. Student evaluation of teaching effectiveness (SET) is the most common method of evaluating teachers in many developed countries. As reported by Seldin (1993), the use of SET in 600 colleges increased from 29% to 86% between 1973 and 1993 in United States of America. Higher education administrators and departments in developed and most developing countries commonly use student evaluation of teaching as one of the measures of faculty quality in making hiring, retention, tenure, merit and promotion decisions (Hughes, 1996).

The high rate of expansion in higher education in Nigeria, the fear that selection and promotion of academic staff is influenced by political issues, tribal allegiance and bribery (Watkins & Akande, 1992), lends support to the need for evaluation of teaching quality by the direct users – the students. Many stakeholders in education system believe that students, who are the major recipients of the teaching process, should take active part in determining the teaching that has been effective or not (Mackeachie & Kappan, 1996; North Carolina, State University, 1994; Scriven, 1995). Scriven states that student ratings add a valuable component to the range of input for the evaluation of teachers. Ironically, this very form of teacher evaluation has been the subject of controversial education research literature (Ley,

1981; Prisco, 1979; Rotem & Glassman, 1979). Some researchers present evidence in support of SET as an important aspect of teacher education (Aleamoni, 1981; Okoye, 1998; Scriven, 1995; Socha, 2009). They contend that students, as consumers of instruction, are not only best qualified to judge the product being offered, but will do so accurately under appropriate conditions. Many other researchers question the reliability and validity of SET and argue that student judgments may be influenced by some factors that have nothing to do with teaching effectiveness. It is also seen as demolishing and often fails to capture the lecturer's ability to foster creation of learning and as a tool for improving instruction (Deming, 1986; Emery, Kramer & Tian 2003; Lindahl & Unger, 2010).

SETs were originally designed to serve formative purposes but their feedback is now being used by many school management bodies to determine promotion and tenure of faculty staff (Baldwin & Blattner, 2003; Poyas & Smith, 2007). The controversy over student evaluating of teaching lies, in the main, on the purpose to which the SET scores are put and the students' ability to carry out a valid evaluation. An example given by Andersen and Miller, (1997, p.216) illustrates this. A College used "hard and fast cut-off" based on the SET scores to determine lecturers' qualification for tenure which holds that "if faculty members' score are below 4.0 on a 5 point scale, he or she cannot be considered for tenure" Thus this college uses SET for summative purposes. In another scenario, SET was used to

improve instructors' teaching as a result of feedback from students (Rifkin, 1995; Veveve & Kozlinskis, 2011). If these decisions are going to be made based on students evaluation scores, how valid are these measures?

One objection to SET is on its validity as a measure of teaching effectiveness. Students are seen as unable to assess good teaching. Some others go further to show results of studies which indicate that students and faculties offer very similar responses when asked to rank aspects of teaching in terms of their relative importance (Center for teaching and learning (CTL), 1994). Scriven (1995) expresses the following concerns for student ratings:

1. Student rating forms ask many questions about matters that students do not appear to be in any position to judge reliably.
2. The validation studies that are used to justify student ratings are questionable indicators instead of true criterion.
3. Inadequate time to complete forms.
4. The use of instructors to collect forms rating their own instructional merit.
5. Lack of controls over pleas for sympathy or indulgence by the teacher before forms are distributed.
6. Failing to ensure an acceptable return rate.

However, some studies have found evidence that support the validity and reliability of SET. CTL (1994) reported two of such research findings. Study 1 on validity of SET is an analysis of 41 studies which found that there was, in fact, a statistically significant, positive correlation between student ratings of teaching and student achievement. Study 2 is one in which student ratings were collected on the same instructors teaching the same course in four consecutive years. The study showed consistent pattern: the instructors received similar ratings year after year.

The validity of student evaluations is dependent on the context of how and when they are administered (Gordon, n.d.). North Carolina State University (1994) recognizes anonymity and confidentiality as two basic principles governing distribution, collection and handling of evaluation instruments.

Higher Education Students' Evaluation of Teaching in Nigeria

Higher education teacher evaluation in Nigeria has for a long time been based primarily of teachers' publications, excluding entirely teachers' effectiveness in the instructional process. This situation has rather weakened the higher education system instead of strengthening it. The evaluation of teachers is also done primarily for summative rather than formative purposes, which indicates complete lack of concern on what transpires in the classroom.

Most teachers abandon lectures with the excuse of conducting research and publishing articles and textbooks while others teach half-heartedly with lack of concern for students' understanding. Consequently, the learner suffers and grades are awarded whether or not students are taught or guided to learn (Idaka, Joshua & Kritsonis, 2006). The Nigerian Universities' Commission (NUC) recently introduced SET in the universities in the country but the implementation, in many of these universities, has been that of 'fulfilling all righteousness' rather than using it for obtaining relevant data for improvement of teaching quality. Interactions with faculty staff on the issue of SET generated the following comments:

1. "SET is demeaning and an insult to teachers"
2. "SET is an erosion on academic autonomy of staff."
3. "Students do not have the capability of producing valid measures."

Studies on SET in Nigerian schools have been done and these have produced contradictory results. A study by Idaka, Joshua and Kritsonis (2006) on attitude of Nigerian academic staff to student evaluation of instruction revealed a significantly positive attitude, notwithstanding the purposes to be served by such evaluation. Another study by Iyamu and Aduwa-Oglebaen (2005, p.6) on lecturers' perception of students' evaluation in Nigerian universities revealed that:

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.
3. Nigerian University lecturers are more accepting of student evaluation for formative purposes than for summative purposes.

Many studies done on SET have been based on perceptions of faculty staff and researchers in developed countries. Few of these studies have been done in Nigeria setting. Most of the studies done abroad and in Nigeria on SET have also concentrated on attitude of the teachers to SET. Studies on perceptions of students to evaluating their teachers in Nigeria have been very sparse. There is therefore a need to determine students' perception of SET and students' views on whether SET will serve formative or summative purposes.

The purpose of this study, therefore, was to determine the perceptions of higher education students on the use of SET in Nigerian institutions of

higher learning. The study further determined the influenced of gender, course discipline and type of institution on students' perception of SET. The views of the students on whether SET should be used for formative or summative purposes were also ascertained.

The study was designed to answer the following research questions:

1. How do students perceive the adoption of Students' Evaluation of Teaching (SET) in higher institutions in Nigeria?
2. How do students perceive the relevance of SET in higher institutions in Nigeria?
3. How do students perceive their capacity for evaluating teaching?
4. What are students' perceptions on the purposes for what SET should be used, for formative and summative purposes?

METHOD

Students in three higher education institutions in Anambra State, Nigeria participated in the study. The institutions represented three types of higher education institutions in Nigeria. They were made up of one university; one Polytechnic; and one College of Education. 600 students were sampled from the universities, polytechnics and college of education through multi-stage random sampling technique.

An attitude questionnaire schedule developed and validated by the researchers was used to collect data. The instrument was structured on a 4 point scale of strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree. The inter-item reliability coefficient of the instrument stood at .72. The instrument was administered in the various institutions through the help of research assistants. The statistical procedures used for data analysis were weighted mean and standard deviation. They were used to answer the research questions formulated to guide the study.

RESULTS

Students' Perception of the Adoption of SET in Nigerian Higher Education

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics on Students' Perception of Adoption of SET in Higher Education in Nigeria (n = 600).

No	Items	Mean	Std.Dev.
1	Use of SET is acceptable to me	3.27	.87
10	SET should be used in all schools	3.15	.87

Table 1 shows that, on the average, students are positively disposed towards the introduction of Student Evaluating of Teaching (SET) in Nigerian higher education. This is shown by their mean responses to the item on acceptability of SET (M=3.27) and the item that states the SET should be used in all schools (M=3.15). On the 4 point scale used for this study, these mean responses were considered high enough.

Students' Perception of the Relevance SET in Nigerian Higher Education

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics on Students' Perception of the Relevance of SET in Higher Education in Nigeria (N = 600).

Items	Mean	Sd
2. SET will be beneficial to me as student	3.32	.92
8. SET will help to improve students' learning	3.21	.92
11. SET will make lecturers to be more serious in their teaching engagement	3.15	.94
12. SET will be a forum for students to suggest areas of improvement in teaching/learning situation.	3.16	.91
14. SET will make teachers to be more punctual and regular in classes.	3.03	.96
15. SET will encourage better teacher/student relationship.	2.51	1.04

Results of this study show that students in higher education have high positive perception of the relevance of SET in higher education in Nigeria. As shown in table 2, all the six listed areas of relevance received high mean ratings except for the item that states that "SET will encourage better lecturer-student relationships" which had a mean response of 2.51; an indication that students slightly agree that SET will encourage better lecturer-student relationship

Students' Perception of their Capacity to Evaluate Teaching

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics on Students' Perception of their Capacity of Evaluating Teaching (n = 600).

Items	Mean	Std.Dev.
3. SET should be used because students are the best judge of whether they learnt or not.	2.99	.92
4. Students are capable of properly evaluating their teachers.	2.53	.94
5. Students are the most qualified sources to report on the extent to which the learning experience was productive and worthwhile.	3.08	.93
6. Students are not mature enough to determine whether the teacher's teaching was informative enough.	2.37	.99
7. SET may be wrongly used by students to victimize lecturers they do not like.	2.70	.96

Table 3 shows that students positively perceive their ability to evaluate teaching. This could be seen from their to the item that states that students are the most qualified sources to report on the extent to which the learning experience was productive and worthwhile (M = 3.08), followed by the item which states that SET should be used because students are the best judge of whether they have learnt or not (M

= 2.99). It is worthy of note that the only completely unfavourable item, which states that students are not mature enough to determine whether the teacher's teaching was informative enough had the least mean (M = 2.37). from the entire result, one could therefore safely conclude that the respondents were of the view that students have the capability to evaluate teaching.

Students' Perception of the Purposes for which SET should be used

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics on Students' Perception of the Purposes for which SET should be used (n = 600).

Items	Mean	Sd
9. SET should be used to help the lecturers improve their teaching and classroom instruction.	3.21	.87
13. SET should be used to help lecturers evaluate themselves and improve.	3.07	.95
16. SET should be used for lecturer promotion decision.	2.84	.91
17. SET should be used for salary decision.	2.79	1.04
18. SET should be used for rewarding quality teaching.	3.05	.97
19. SET should be used for decision on whether to retain lecturers or not.	2.81	.99

Students' mean responses show that they are disposed to the use of SET for both formative and summative but more for formative. As shown by the mean responses on the two items that concern formative evaluation, use for improvement of lecturers' teaching and classroom instruction had mean response 3.21 and using SET to help lecturers evaluate themselves had mean response 3.07. These are substantially above the cut point of 2.50. Also suggestions that SET should be used for summative purposes all had positive responses from the students. This is evident from their mean responses on use of SET for promotion (M= 2.84), for decision on salary (M=2.79), for rewarding quality teaching (M= 3.05), and for decisions on teacher retention (M= 2.81). This means that the students perceive that SET should be used for both formative and summative purposes, but more for formative.

judgment of quality of teaching delivered in the classrooms. Other researchers (Greenwald & Gilmore, 1997; Harrison, Ryan & Moore, 1996; Scriven, 1995) found out that students are not only capable of evaluating teaching but the best judge of what they have learned.

The students were found to be positively inclined to the use of SET for both formative and summative purposes. This supports the observation of Verve and Kozlinskis (2011) that one of the most crucial factors in quality education is the evaluation of teaching by students. It can be regarded as an instrument-enhancing feedback whereas improvement of teaching quality is seen as a prerequisite. Other studies conducted across the years which found that SET is more applicable as a feedback tool (Berk, 2008-2009 cited in Vevere & Kozlinskis, 2011; Cashin, 1989; Way, 1993) corroborate this finding.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study was aimed at determining the perception of Nigerian higher education students towards use of SET in their various institution. It was found that students were positively disposed towards the introduction of SET in Nigerian higher institutions as it will not only encourage better lecture-student relationship but also fast track their personal and academic development. This corroborates the findings of Howards, Conway and Maxwell (1985) ; Marsh and Roche (1997) cited in Campbell, Gerdes and Steiner (2005) who observed that students liked SET procedures and that there was no clear research indicating what measure of teaching quality was better than those produced by SET.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Student evaluation of teaching quality is a positive step towards quality assurance in Nigerian institutions of higher learning. From the findings, one would conclude that this mode of evaluation is positively perceived by students in tertiary institutions in Anambra State as a way of not only improving the classroom instruction process but also relevant to their personal and academic development. The implication of this is that they are favourably disposed to the use of SET as a mode of evaluating teaching. As regards whether this evaluation mode should be used for formative and/or summative purposes, the the respondents, while agreeing that it should be used for the two, were of the view that it should be used more for formative than summative purposes.

The study also revealed that students perceived themselves as being capable of evaluating teaching as they were the recipients of the teaching efforts, and therefore better judges of whether the teaching had been effective or not. Barnett, Mathews and Jackson (2003) found similar students' views. They concluded that students are capable of giving a valid

Based on the conclusions above, this study recommends that:

1. Educational institutions should be more serious with the use of SET in evaluating teaching.

2. Scores from SET should be one of the criteria to guide employers of labour in tertiary institutions in deciding on whether or not a person's employment would be confirmed.
3. To avoid abuse of and cruelty at times associated with SET, the feedback obtained will be better used initially for formative purposes which will benefit both the students and the faculty staff especially in the areas of knowledge transfer and evaluation of instructional process.

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