

Students' Ratings Of Teaching Effectiveness: What Do Students Tell Us About Their Teacher Education Lecturers?

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Abstract

In an increasingly diverse teaching and learning environment today, there have been countless discussions and debates on the effectiveness of teaching in higher institutions of learning. Even with decades of research, the issue on effective teaching has yet to be resolved. Acknowledging this literature gap, this study was conducted to assess effectiveness of teaching using students' rating of lecturers' performance at the end of the semester. An online survey form was used to rate lecturers' teaching effectiveness in one of the teaching education institutes in Malaysia. A total of 4768 ratings were collected and 120 lecturers were rated. The findings of the study reviewed that none of the ten items on lecturers' teaching effectiveness was given an 'excellent' rating. The students rated the lecturers as 'very good' in their teaching effectiveness in five of the items. These five items were related to the lecturers' ability in conducting teaching learning activities in accordance to the course pro-forma; providing awareness on the development of human capital, commitment towards teaching and learning, monitoring and giving feedbacks and motivating students to pursue learning activities. The students' perceptions towards the teaching effectiveness of the remaining five items were rated as 'good', which was one level lower in the teaching effectiveness scale. The 'good' teaching effectiveness ratings were given to effective management of teaching and learning, implementing course assignments aligned to topics taught, engaging active participation in learning, providing thought provoking activities and giving clear presentations. In terms of the differences in lecturers' teaching effectiveness according to gender, the study found that female lecturers were perceived as better performers than their male counterparts. However, the differences were not statistically significant. Recommendations of the study are also included in the report.

Keywords: Student Evaluation; Teaching effectiveness; Teacher Education

Introduction

In an increasingly diverse and complex teaching and learning environment in institution of higher learning, the area of primary concern is the drivers and debates sparking a growing attention to good quality teaching. In fact, years of research have proven that there is nothing more important for a learning institution to provide for their students than giving them effective lecturers. Jordan, Mendro, and Weerasinghe (1997) reported that by spending a few years with effective teachers can put even the most disadvantaged students on the path to success whereas a few years with ineffective teachers can deal students an academic blow which they may never recover. Therefore, providing effective lecturers to students should be an utmost consideration in higher institution of learning, both private and public.

In a competitive world of education today most institutions of learning and students at large demand for effective teaching and learning to take place, both inside and outside the classroom. They expected effective lecturers to help raise the level of students' motivation to learn so that students' academic and nonacademic achievements can be further enhanced. This would significantly contribute to satisfaction of students in learning which in turn affects the image of the learning institution as well as student loyalty (Helgesen & Nasset, 2007).

However, most of the time lecturers pursue their own ideas or perceptions of effective teaching and learning. Although perceptions may vary according to subjects taught or individual areas of responsibility but often teaching and learning activities include developing and implementing effective methods of teaching, designing, preparing and developing teaching materials, assessing students' coursework, setting and marking examinations and supporting students through a pastoral or advisory role. Most would also employ a wide range of pedagogical approaches, considered effective, to facilitate students under their supervision. Among these approaches may include lectures, seminars, tutorials, practical laboratory demonstration, field works. or e-learning. Multimedia technologies are also integrated and increasingly used in the classroom.

As lecturers progress with their day to day operation in the classroom, they need to know whether the implementation of good effective teaching initiatives and strategies used are well received by the students. One suitable method to measure teaching effectiveness is students' evaluation of lecturers' performance, which is often carried out at the end of the semester or at the end of a course/programme in most institutions of learning.

Hence, this study aimed to investigate the students' perceptions of lecturers' teaching effectiveness at the end of the semester in order to gauge the overall teaching quality of the lecturers assigned to teach them throughout the semester.

Specifically, the study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the students' perceptions towards the teaching effectiveness of lecturers?
2. Is there any significant difference in the teaching effectiveness of male and female lecturers?

Literature Review

Students' assessment or evaluation on effectiveness in teaching is not a recent phenomenon in the world of education. In fact the initiative taken to evaluate teaching has started as early as the 1915 (Wachtel,1998). According to Wachtel (1998), the first teacher rating scale was published in 1915 and the first study of students' evaluation of teacher effectiveness was written in the 1920s. For many decades, the outcome of students' evaluation of teaching effectiveness is seen as an important tool to measure the effectiveness of teaching quality. It has been used to reflect on qualities associated with good teaching such as lecturers' knowledge, clarity, classroom management and course organization. Beside being a measurement tool on teaching effectiveness, the feedbacks obtained from the evaluation can help the lecturer concern to grow and develop professionally through self-reflecting on their practices. To the learning institution, the results of the evaluation is beneficial to the managing directors to identify specific areas for improving the performance of the lecturers (Yeoh, Ho and Chan,2012) or organizing relevant continuous professional development programme for skill enhancement of the teaching staff. In some cases, the outcome of this evaluation is used to formulate key performance index of lecturers in staff appraisal for both promotion and tenure decisions (Griffin, 1999; Liaw & Goh, 2003). Some policy makers may also use the information to make important decisions pertaining to compensation, re-hiring and termination of contract teaching staff. This implies that student evaluation of lecturers' teaching effectiveness served to benefit every participating member of the education community. As the possible benefits that can be gained from students' evaluation are multifaceted and findings of such studies are considered reliable and valid, therefore, the importance of students' evaluation cannot be completely ignored.

Difference in Teaching effectiveness according to Gender

Several empirical studies on students' evaluation of teaching effectiveness revealed gender differences. Most studies reported that students, generally on an average, awarded lower rating for female educators than their male counterparts (Farley, 1996; Mesner, 2000). For instance, a multivariate analysis of almost 17,000 student evaluation revealed significantly higher evaluation for male faculty (Hamermesh & Parker, 2005). Consistent with this finding was another study of evaluation gathered in 741 courses taught at 21 different institutions, which also showed that women faculty received significantly lower rating than male colleagues (Centra & Gaubatz, 2000). According to Farley (1996) and Mesner, (2000), students perceived their female teachers as biased, having an agenda, rigid, domatic, grumpy and angry while their male colleagues were seen as objective, relaxed and comfortable, flexible, open-minded, good humoured and fair. Although several studies have reported that male and female teachers received different evaluation ratings from students, it is the aim of this study to find out if this phenomenon exists in the current study.

Method

Research Design

This study aimed to investigate the perception of students towards the teaching effectiveness of lecturers. The researcher employed a quantitative research methodology to address the predetermined research questions of the study.

Population

The population comprise of all the students pursuing a teacher education programme in Teacher Education Insitute at Batu Lintang Campus in the year 2013. A total of 884 students from various teacher education programmes took part in the study.

Instrumentation

Since 2009, all the students enrolled in this institute were required to evaluate their lecturers using an online teaching effectiveness scale as specified by the Department of Standards Malaysia which is a member of International Organization for Standardization (MS ISO), a body that monitors the quality of services rendered to the students. The scale comprised of ten statements to determine lecturers' teaching effectiveness such as keeping to the course outline, organizing teaching and learning activities, setting appropriate course assignment, getting students involvement in the classroom, using suitable delivery methods, providing feedbacks, motivating students and lecturers personality traits. Each statement is scored on a five-point likert typed scale with a score of 1 indicating unsatisfactory teaching effectiveness and a score of 5 to indicate excellent teaching effectiveness. Completion of the evaluation form takes about 5-10 minutes.

Data Collection Procedure

Before the end of every semester, the students were instructed to complete an online evaluation form pertaining to their lecturers' teaching effectiveness. This is a requirement set by the institute, in compliance with MS ISO, that all the teaching staff be evaluated by the students under they care. As a result of the evaluation process, the institute received 4768 completed evaluation forms submitted by the students during the 2013 academic year and 120 lecturers were evaluated.

Data Analysis

Statistical analyses such as, descriptive statistics, were used to analyse the data. Among the descriptive statistics used were frequency distribution, measures of central tendency and measures of variability. Mean scores were calculated and standard deviations were used to measure variability.

Results and Discussion

Demographic Profiles of Lecturers

This study was conducted to measure lecturers' teaching effectiveness using students' end of semester evaluation. Out of the total 120 lecturers that were evaluated by the students, 60 were female lecturers and 60 male lecturers. These lecturers were assigned to

13 departments with the majority from Language (25), Educational studies (16) and Social Studies (16). The rest of the departments were Malay studies (13), Mathematics (9), Science (8), Physical and Health Education (7), Research (6), Student Welfare (5), Religious and Moral Studies (5), Management (5), Educational Technology (3) and Co-Curricular (2).

Students' Perception of Lecturers' Teaching Effectiveness

Students were given a 10-item instrument online to rate the lecturers teaching effectiveness. Table 1 displayed the mean scores and standard deviations of the 10 items in descending order. Among the ten items surveyed, the findings of the study reviewed that none of the items were given a rating equivalent to 'excellent' teaching effectiveness. Nevertheless, all the items achieved the minimum mean score of 4.50, the standard imposed by MS ISO. The students perceived the teaching effectiveness of lecturers as 'very good' in 5 of the items while the remaining 5 items were rated as 'good'.

The five top performing items rated as 'very good' were related to the ability in conducting teaching learning activities in accordance to the course pro-forma (M=4.84); providing awareness on the development of human capital (M=4.84) commitment towards teaching and learning (M=4.82); monitoring and giving feedbacks (M=4.81); and motivating students to pursue learning activities(M=4.81) .

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations of Lecturers' Teaching Effectiveness

No.	Items on Teaching Effectiveness	Mean*	Std. Deviation
1	Implementation of teaching and learning activities in accordance to course pro-forma	4.84	0.20
2	Provide awareness on human capital development	4.84	0.18
3	Commitment and professionalise displayed when conducting teaching and learning activities,	4.82	0.22
4	Monitor and give feedbacks on student mastery of learning.	4.81	0.26
5	Motivate students to pursue learning activities.	4.80	0.22
6	Effective management of teaching and learning activities	4.79	0.24
7	Implementation of the course assignment according to topics taught	4.79	0.23
8	Active student participation in teaching and learning activities	4.79	0.22
9	Provision of learning activities that stimulate thinking	4.79	0.22
10	Clear presentation of course content.	4.74	0.27

* excellent (4.90-5.00) very good (4.80-4.89) good (4.70-4.79) satisfactory (4.60-4.69) marginal (4.50-4.59) unsatisfactory (1.00-4.49)

Among the ten items surveyed, the students perceived that the lecturers did extremely well in both implementing teaching and learning activities in accordance to the course pro-forma as well as providing awareness on the development of human capital, which received the highest ratings from the students. By adhering to the course pro-forma, students would be able to know what to learn, how much to learn, how they would be assessed and what area of content would be tested in the end of semester examination. Students perceived the course pro-forma as an important tool to help them, not only to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills pertaining to their area of specialization, but also to do well in course assignments and to pass the examination at the end of the semester.

Students also perceived lecturers' competency in providing awareness on human capital development as very good. Lecturers need to be aware on the new and existing knowledge, competencies, social and personality attributes that are needed in the teaching profession. Due to the complexity of the profession, lecturers need to assist students to constantly learn, unlearn and relearn where necessary so that teaching and learning will always remain relevant. Hence, awareness in human capital development is important for both the trainers and trainees.

The next highest ranking was related to lecturers' commitment to teaching and learning. The students perceived the lecturers as committed to their teaching job. Commitment is important as it is one of the key factors of successful teaching and learning. Lecturers who are committed often showed concern towards the development of students' academic or non-academic achievements. Commitment is also displayed in how motivated students are in learning, the efforts lecturers put in to preparing lectures, assignments and even comments made on tests and paper. This finding showed that students perceived the lecturers as committed to teaching and learning.

Equally important is giving feedbacks to students. Students want to know how well they are progressing and which areas of improvement are needed. According to Ip (2005), the knowledge that they are progressing well gives them a sense of achievement and motivates learning. At the same time, students need to know where they have gone wrong so that corrective measures can be taken. Hence, to be an effective lecturer, it is absolutely essential to monitor students' learning and give them feedback. There are various approaches that lecturers can choose to give feedbacks, such as, to individual students, to a group or to the whole class.

The last item in the list of 'very good teaching effectiveness' rating relates to student's motivation. Students perceived the lecturers' skills in motivating students to continue learning as relatively very good in comparison to other skills surveyed. Motivating students to learn is important as motivation energizes, directs and sustains behaviour which keeps them going (Ormrod, 2008). The motivation would be reflected in their cognitive, emotional and behavioural engagement in learning activities (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004). It determines whether the learning activities are accomplished enthusiastically, apathetically or lackadaisically. Virtually, all students are motivated to learn but need the extra push from their lecturers to keep them going. By

playing the role of a motivator, lecturers can help promote continuous learning as well as long-term success and productivity in the students.

Among the ten items surveyed, the students perceived the lecturers' teaching effectiveness as 'very good' in these five areas which received the top five ratings from the students. However, the mean scores of lecturers' teaching effectiveness dropped in the remaining five areas. Although, the mean scores of lecturers' teaching effectiveness achieved the minimum level imposed by MS ISO, the students perceived their teaching effectiveness as 'good', which was one level lower in the teaching effectiveness scale. The five areas were related to effective management of teaching and learning (M=4.79); implementing course assignments aligned to topics taught (M=4.79); engaging active participation in learning (M=4.79); providing thought provoking activities (M=4.79); and giving clear presentations (M=4.74).

Effective management of teaching and learning activities is an integral part of teaching effectiveness. It can include setting suitable teaching and learning objectives, determining what to teach, knowledge, skills or attitudes, how to teach, the approaches and strategies to be employed, how to assess, formative or summative and whether remedial or enrichment programmes should be introduced as a follow-up to the lesson. Hence, proper planning, organizing and managing teaching and learning activities can contribute to maximize students' motivation, involvement and cooperation in learning. The students perceived the lecturers' teaching effectiveness as good in this aspect.

Similar ratings were given to the item related to course assignments. Students perceived the lecturers teaching effectiveness as 'good' in ensuring that assignments were developed based on the topics taught in class. For almost all the courses taken, students are required to accomplish a course assignment to enable the lecturer to assess, either mastery and/or application of knowledge and skills acquired. Lecturers who assigned coursework aligned to what was taught served as useful guide to enable the students to accomplish the assignment successfully. It would not be appropriate to assign students to read or review materials that are not relevant to the course. Nor should students be assessed on knowledge and skills which are not specifically outlined as important in the course objectives. However, the students perceived that lecturers need to work on improving this aspect, that is, in formatting questions or developing activities in course assignments that are related to course content or course objectives.

The ability of lecturers in eliciting active participation is also perceived as good only. Student participation or engagement should be encouraged in today's classroom. Through participation, students are more motivated (Junn, 1994), learn better (Weaver & Qi, 2005), improved communication skills (Dancer & Kamvounias, 2005) and are better critical thinkers (Crone, 1997). Lecturers should recognize the importance of student participation and reduce dependence on teacher-centered teaching methodologies such as lecture method, which restrict students' engagement in the lesson. In fact, the traditional lecture-only format is losing its prevalence in the classroom today. Instead, it has been replaced with mixed delivery method such as group discussion, dyadic work or peer review to minimize lecturing. In class participation has become increasingly important

today especially among millennial generation students who demand more interaction from their classroom experience (Allred & Swenson, 2006; Howe & Strauss, 2000).

The second last item in the ranking of teaching effectiveness which was given a ‘good’ rating, is related to lecturers used of learning activities that require thinking skills. Lecturers should be encouraged to use more thought-provoking learning activities where students can learn actively either through reading, writing, listening, questioning or reflecting as compared to the standard modes of instruction in which learners passively absorb the knowledge transmitted by the lecturer. There is a growing body of research that concluded that when students have ample opportunities to clarify, question and reflect, their critical thinking skills improved, retention and transfer of new information increased, motivation increased and improvement in interpersonal skills, resulting in overall improvement in quality of learning (Centre of teaching and learning, 2008). Therefore, lecturers need to create or provide more opportunities through thought-provoking learning activities to engage the students actively in the teaching and learning process. Such activities, among others, may include group discussion, problem solving, case studies, role plays or journal writing.

The last item that students rated as ‘good’ teaching effectiveness relates to giving clear presentation of course content. Lecturers should be able to give clear presentation to assist the students in making sense of and absorbing new knowledge and skills taught. Students would welcome lecturers who are able to present the material in a clear and logical sequence. The material presented must also be intelligible and meaningful to the students. It is important not to overburden them with too many main points in each lecture and not to use too many different types of presentation materials, which can confused the learners. The lecturers’ teaching effectiveness was perceived as ‘good’ only in this aspect.

Differences in Teaching effectiveness according to Gender

Out of total 120 lecturers that were evaluated by the students, 60 were female lecturers and 60 male lecturers. In terms teaching effectiveness according to gender, the findings showed that the rating for female lecturers (M= 4.82) were higher than male lecturers (M= 4.78) which implied that female lecturers were perceived as better performers than male lecturers.

Table 2
Independent sample t-test of Teaching Effectiveness and Gender

Gender	N	Mean	t	df	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	F	sig
Male	60	4.78						
Female	60	4.82	-1.232	118	-.047	.038	0.328	.568

Further data analysis using independent sample t-test was used to determine the differences in mean scores between male and female lecturers. The data analysis

displayed in Table 2, showed that the differences in males and female teaching effectiveness were not statistically significant. It cannot be concluded that female lecturers performed better than male lecturers in terms of teaching effectiveness. This finding seems to contradict past studies, as generally, female educators were awarded lower rating than their male counterparts (Farley, 1996; Mesner, 2000; Hamermesh & Parker, 2005; Centra & Gaubatz, 2000).

Implications and Recommendations

The purpose of this study is to investigate lecturers' teaching effectiveness using students' end of semester evaluation. The findings of the study reviewed that none of the ten items on lecturers' teaching effectiveness was given an 'excellent' rating. The students perceived the teaching effectiveness of lecturers as 'very good' in 5 of the items surveyed. These five items were related to the lecturers' ability in conducting teaching learning activities in accordance to the course pro-forma; providing awareness on the development of human capital, commitment towards teaching and learning, monitoring and giving feedbacks and motivating students to pursue learning activities. It is hoped that lecturers would continue to maintain the strengths as detected from the empirical data of the study.

On the other hand, the findings also served to provide valuable information to lecturers on areas of personnel improvement related to their teaching and learning performance. The students' perceptions on teaching effectiveness towards the remaining five items were rated as 'good' which was one level lower in the teaching effectiveness scale. These items were related to effective management of teaching and learning, implementing course assignments aligned to topics taught, engaging active participation in learning, providing thought provoking activities and giving clear presentations. This evaluation results disclosed areas of knowledge and skills that lecturers should consider for further enhancement. The results served to provide feedbacks to lecturers on their teaching effectiveness and if the evaluation results are seriously taken into consideration, it can lead to overall quality improvement of the lecturer's teaching effectiveness.

This finding also served to benefit managing directors by disclosing future training needs of lecturers. According to Nakpodia (2011), evaluation is an information gathering process where the information obtained can be used for the purpose of aiding decision makers. Managing directors, being the main decision makers can use the information gathered through the evaluation process to help them in their decision making pertaining to the existing or planned continuous professional development (CPD) courses for the teaching staff. Hence, based on the findings of the study, suitable and relevant CPD courses can be designed, focussing on areas where ratings of teaching effectiveness were relatively lower.

When evaluations of lecturers' teaching effectiveness are rigorously executed, the information gained can serve multiple purposes. To the lecturers, they would be able to know their strengths and weakness as perceived by the students. By maintaining their strengths and overcoming their weaknesses, overall quality of teaching and learning

would be heightened. To the faculty heads, being more informed of the teaching staffs' teaching effectiveness can assist them in making better decisions to improve or sustain educational standards by providing excellent lecturers to students who need them most and by advancing policies and practices that ensure effective teaching and learning in every classroom. Beside quality improvement and maintaining educational standards, evaluations of teaching effectiveness is one of the keys to validate policies, plans and procedures operating within the institution (Walklin, 1992). For instance, the information from the evaluation exercise could also be used by decision makers to determine staff promotions or even to extend service of contract staff.

The results of the study contribute to add to the sparse or non-existent literature related to lecturers' teaching effectiveness in this institute. Further research using a bigger population scale should be conducted to add to this body of knowledge. It would be interesting for future researchers to also investigate lecturers' teaching effectiveness that goes beyond academic responsibilities in the classroom, such as research publications and participation in academic conferences, workshops and seminars. Such involvements have been proven to increase lecturers' teaching effectiveness in the classroom. Evaluations of lecturers performed by peers, heads of department and managing directors could also be investigated in future studies.

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