

University Lecturers' Views on Student-Lecturer Evaluations

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ABSTRACT This paper discusses university lecturers' views on student-lecturer evaluation of teaching and learning process. Specific reference is given to the university lecturers' views on the usefulness of the evaluation exercise, the evaluation process, items in the evaluation questionnaires and evaluation feedback reports at a formerly disadvantaged South African University. A total of 118 (53.8%) lecturers out of a staff establishment of 219 teaching staff volunteered their participation in this study. Participating lecturers in this descriptive survey design that used predominantly a quantitative approach, were given the opportunity to make their comments based on the results of the student-lecturer evaluation findings. Data were then analysed using content analysis and emerging themes were identified and discussed. The findings of the study show that insights from student-lecturer evaluations are an important source of information for university teaching staff and administration to consider in their quest to improve on the quality of university teaching and learning moves that can help improve on throughput rates. Based on the findings, we conclude that student-lecturer evaluations are beneficial and recommend that their contributions be taken with an open mind alongside other sources of data such as peer evaluations.

INTRODUCTION

This study is premised on the observation that teaching is a complex process that "involves the interweaving of content knowledge, pedagogy skills and a knowledge and appreciation of the multi-faceted nature of students to, in the end, be able to point to evidence that learning has occurred" (Helterbran 2008:126). This study further builds on the observations by Makondo (2010:263) that most university teaching staff members are consciously or otherwise, playing significant roles in their students' academic underperformance due to their failure to effectively deliver their lectures and examine their learner's performance. Resultantly, 'mindset change' (Makondo 2012) is requisite for the attainment of improved throughput rates.

Many universities in the world have devised various forms of lecturer evaluation in a bid to improve the quality of teaching and learning with a view to improving student performance (Thorn-ton et al. 2010; McCarthy 2012). It is within this

framework that this study examined lecturers' perceptions of student-lecturer evaluation at a formerly disadvantaged South African university. As Heine and Maddox (2012) put it, student evaluation of teaching (SET) has long been the subject of research, primarily focusing on two areas. The first area addresses the accuracy of students' perceptions regarding their teachers' performance in class. Secondly, research has focused upon uncovering the source of students' perceptions about teaching effectiveness and quality.

From Richardson (2005) and Wilson and Ryan (2012), it is clear that one form of evaluation of teaching that has gained prominence the world over is the soliciting of student feedback on their experience of the teaching and learning process. Harvey (2001: 2) attests that, "most higher education institutions around the world collect some type of feedback from students about their experience of higher education...[and get] the expressed opinions of students about the service they receive as students." Moreover, Marsh and Hocevar (1991: 30) add that,

Students' evaluations of teaching effectiveness (SETEs) are widely collected and used for a variety of purposes such as personnel decisions, feedback to faculty on the effectiveness of their teaching, input into students' course selection and research on teaching.

Furthermore, according to Machingambi and Wadesango (2011) the literature on student evaluations of teaching effectiveness (SETE) con-

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sists of thousands of studies and dates back to the 1920s. For instance, in the USA College administrators are said to have eagerly embraced SETE in the 1960s because they were perceived to be able to offer a ready vehicle for assessing faculty (teaching staff) hired to teach the droves of students entering post-secondary institutes (Emery et al. 2003). Richardson (2005) further notes that in North America, the practice of obtaining student feedback on individual teachers and course units is widespread, while Miller (2012) states that today, more than 90% of U.S. colleges and universities use some sort of student evaluation mechanism to assess teaching.

In South Africa following a cohort study by Scott et al. (2007) which indicated that five years after entering university, only 30% of the total first-time entering student intake into the sector had graduated, there have been increased calls for improved throughput rates. This saw various quality improvement mechanisms being put in place. At national level, the Education White Paper 3 (1997) established the Council on Higher Education (CHE) with the proviso to, among other things, promote quality assurance in higher education and audit the quality assurance mechanisms of higher education institutions. The establishment of the Council on Higher Education and its subcommittee, the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) has seen the introduction of institutional audits as one major attempt to promote quality in the system (CHE 2004). Therefore, in South Africa, at the micro level, institutions have also found innovative ways to assure the quality of teaching and learning and the use of student feedback has emerged as a prominent mechanism (UFH Evaluation of Teaching and Learning Policy 2008, UNIVEN Monitoring and Evaluation of Teaching and Learning Policy 2009).

Benefits of Using Student Evaluation of Teaching Feedback

Numerous benefits have been attributed to the use of student evaluation of teaching feedback in higher education both for decision-making and for providing lens through which lecturers can reflect on and improve teaching, learning and affirming ownership of the teaching and learning process by students. As Kember et al. (2002: 412) show, "ratings from student feedback questionnaires are also commonly made use of

in appraisal exercises. Decisions about tenure, contract renewal and promotion now commonly require evidence of teaching ability". McCormack (2005) concurs by pointing out that the results of student evaluation contribute to judgements about the quality of teaching and decisions about promotion and funding in many institutions, as well as to improving an individual's teaching practice.

According to Richardson (2005: 401), student feedback can provide diagnostic evidence for teachers and also a measure of teaching effectiveness for administrative decision-making. In the UK, it is becoming increasingly accepted that individual teachers will refer to student feedback both to enhance the effectiveness of their teaching and to support applications for appointment, tenure or promotion. Student feedback also constitutes information for prospective students and other stakeholders in the selection of programmes or course units, and it provides relevant evidence for research into the processes of teaching and learning. Clearly, both students' evaluations of teaching and their perceptions of academic quality have been investigated with each of these aims in mind. The research literature suggests that student feedback constitutes a major source of evidence for assessing teaching quality; that it can be used to inform attempts to improve teaching quality (but simply collecting such feedback is unlikely to lead to such improvements); and that student feedback can be communicated in a way that is informative to future students (Machingambi and Wadesango 2011: 168). However, Warmbrod (2012) cautiously notes that it is essential that administrators and promotion and tenure committees review evidence about the appropriateness, accuracy, currency and rigor of course content – best judged by peers, not students – when making personnel decisions.

Also, logically, this process would culminate in overall increase in the quality of teaching over time. Eble (1974) expounds by identifying four benefits of student evaluation to: increases the chances that excellence in teaching will be recognised and rewarded; provides a means of participating between students and teachers in the teaching-learning process; raises the whole level of instruction and that an institution may be stimulated by student evaluation of teaching to consider its overall goals.

Iyamu and Oglebaen (2005:619) note that student opinion is of particular importance because it represents an important addition to the data customarily used to judge faculty competence. It is the one source of direct and extensive observations of the way teachers carry out their daily and long-range tasks. Iyamu and Oglebaen (2005: 620) further state that, “evaluation provides the only direct and extensive information about a faculty member’s teaching”. Similarly, Harun et al. (2011: 1) write that,

this method is popular and convenient since the students are the group of people who receive the knowledge from their lecturers directly. Students as the major consumers of the higher education system are in a position to evaluate teaching because they are the observers of the lecturer in the classroom.

Within this context, student evaluations of teaching are designed to measure various aspects of the lecturer’s competences in the teaching and learning process. According to Harvey (2001), this may include perceptions about the learning and teaching, the learning support facilities (such as, libraries, computing facilities), the learning environment, (lecture rooms, laboratories, social space and university buildings). On this note, two main functions of evaluation are identified in the literature; internal information to guide improvement and external information for potential students and other stakeholders (Marsh and Dunkin 1992; Richardson 2005). As a result, the four main purposes of the evaluation of teaching and courses by students is to provide formative and diagnostic feedback mechanism; as a summative feedback mechanism; as a source of information for prospective students when selecting course units and lecturers and as a source of data for research on teaching (Keane and Labhrainn 2005:5). Therefore, students’ evaluations of teaching effectiveness are thus variously collected to provide diagnostic feedback to lecturers that will be useful for the improvement of teaching; as measure of teaching effectiveness to be used in personnel and administrative decision making and as information for students and parents (if made available to them) to use in the selection of courses.

Feedback from students, like feedback from other sources such as peers and supervisors can help lecturers to reflect on their teaching practice. Commenting on the merits of obtaining feedback from students on teaching practice, Brook-

field (1995: xiii) writes, “we find out from our students how they perceive our actions and what it is about those actions that they find affirming or inhibiting.” In the same vein, reflecting on his own practice, Brookfield (1995: xi) writes, “talking to my own students made me realize that how I taught, why I taught that way and how my teaching was perceived were far from being the straight forward matters I thought they were”. David and Adebawale (1997) note that students’ evaluation increases the chances of recognizing and rewarding excellence in teaching; provides means of interaction between the teacher and the taught; provides the only direct and extensive information about the teacher; and provide tangible evidence of students’ recognition and involvement in their teaching and learning experience.

As for benefits to the student, Wilson and Ryan (2012: 26) point out that students appreciate being asked to provide feedback about the quality of their instructors’ teaching. This practice communicates to students that their opinions are valued. They further argue that students, particularly the current generation appreciate being given a voice and the opportunity to express themselves. In the same vein Kember et al. (2002: 412) add that, “the support of student evaluation is a tangible sign that faculty and administration recognise the importance of student involvement in shaping the institution’s educational goals and practices”.

The Challenge of Using Student Evaluations for Decision Making

The use of student evaluations in higher education for formative and summative purposes has been met with some resistance (Gold 2001). Richmond (2003) note that most lecturers had no problems with student evaluations as long as the results of such evaluations were used for formative purposes only. As Richardson (2005) shows, some resistance to the use of student ratings has been expressed based on the ideas that students are not competent to make such judgments or that student ratings are influenced by teachers’ popularity rather than their effectiveness. Heine and Maddox (2012) citing Wachtel (1998) are among those who additionally question whether students have the capacity to actually evaluate teaching and teaching effectiveness. Even in western societies, surveys on stu-

dent evaluations of teaching (SET) show that some teachers are not too enthusiastic about the practice of SET.

From Urua (2012), it emerges that debates are still raging on the desirability of students evaluating their teachers. Concerns with student evaluations have been raised around several areas; accuracy of perceptions due to grading leniency, (Keane and Labhrainn 2005; Thornton et al. 2010; Warmbrod 2012), cognitive dissonance (Maurer 2006; Heine and Maddox 2012; Working Group of Academic Council on Student Evaluations of Teaching 2011), poor administration processes (Moore and Kuol 2005) closing the feedback loop (Harvey 2001), infringement on academic freedom (Urua 2012), incapability of students to judge teaching quality (Murray 2005).

A further criticism of student evaluations is that students are not qualified to judge teaching quality. On this note, Keane and Labhrainn (2005) cautiously note that it should be remembered that students are indeed not competent to evaluate teaching roles such as those involving course design (objectives, content, methods and assessment), delivery methods or grading practice in assessment. It is the individual lecturers, their discipline colleagues usually at similar or senior grade (Makondo and Mokoena 2012), curriculum design experts, staff development practitioners or academic development advisors and Heads of Department are best placed to provide feedback on such matters. Of note, is the realization by Makondo (2010) and Murray (2005:7) that students can only evaluate what they can observe and what they observe is mainly what occurs inside the classroom.

From Nigeria, a study by Abdul Raheem et al. (2010:14) report of most lecturers interviewed who were not convinced that university students were mature enough to evaluate their lecturers. Therefore, this study doubted whether students possessed good value-judgments to warrant them to carry out a task of such magnitude.

The manner in which the student-lecturer evaluation has been handled also has great bearing on the subsequent results. This seems the case as poor administration and communication processes have also been identified in the literature as creating negative impressions on student evaluations. From Moore and Kuol (2005), this study noted that too often SET (student evaluation of teaching) systems have been compulsorily, publicly displayed, uncontextualised, un-

supported, simplistic and interpreted in isolated ways, features which render SET's punitive bureaucratic tools rather than supporting mechanisms through which enhanced learning environments can be created and sustained.

Furthermore, sometimes students are not adequately informed of what they gain from the process. In many cases it is not always clear that there is a means to close the loop between data collection and effective action, let alone feedback to students on action taken (Harvey 2001:2). Resultantly, students become disenchanted because they rarely receive any feedback on the views they have offered. Similarly, lecturers become cynical and annoyed because they see student appraisal of teaching as a controlling rather than an improvement-oriented tool.

Objective of the Study

The aim of this study was to examine lecturers' perceptions of student-lecturer evaluation at a formerly disadvantaged South African university. The study sought to answer the following specific research question: What are the lecturer's views on the use of students to evaluate teaching and learning, with specific reference the usefulness of the evaluation exercise, the evaluation process and procedures, items in the evaluation questionnaire and the evaluation feedback reports?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

In this study a descriptive survey design was used. "The purpose of a descriptive study is to provide the opinions of the respondents regarding the phenomenon studied," (Assan and Lumadi 2013:83). In this case, the phenomenon being studied was the evaluation of lecturers' teaching practice by students and lecturer views on this evaluation process.

Population and Sampling

The total staff establishment at the university under study is 219. In order to choose a sample for the study, workshops were held with lecturers in the university on the need and significance of evaluating teaching practice using the

student lens. At the end of each workshop lecturers were implored to voluntarily participate in a pilot evaluation of lecturers by students exercise. A total of 118 lecturers voluntarily enlisted to participate in the exercise.

Data Collection

The 118 volunteer lecturers were requested to submit their timetables to one of the authors of this paper who was an academic advisor so that he could visit them and make logistical arrangements for their student-lecturer evaluations to be done. The approach followed is as expounded by Laube et al. (2007). This saw the lecturers being visited in their lecture halls and the administration of the questionnaire to the students done anytime of the semester. Most often this involved the lecturers leaving the lecture halls while the academic advisor explained the questionnaire contents to the students which contained a variety of questions related to classroom management, subject matter and the lecturer's delivery of subject matter. Once the student-lecturer evaluation results were processed, appointments were made with the lecturers for presentation of reports and feedback discussions. Lecturers were then requested to make comments on the student-lecturer evaluation process in writing based on a semi-structured questionnaire prepared for purpose.

Data Analysis

Data was then analysed using content analysis and emerging themes were identified and discussed. Two phases of data analysis were performed; vertical analysis where responses from each respondent were individually analyzed, line by line and horizontal analysis where analysis was conducted across responses from different respondents for similarities and differences (Ndebele et al. 2013). The themes arrived at are discussed in the results below.

RESULTS

Analysis of the responses from the lecturers produced the following themes which are presented in this section, fairness of the exercise, value of the exercise, views on the entire evaluation, the developmental role of student lecturer evaluations, the importance of student lecturer

evaluations, the strengths of student lecturer evaluations, the administration procedure of the evaluation system and the pitfalls of student lecturer evaluations.

The lecturers who participated in the student-lecturer evaluations gave mixed responses to the exercise. Below are some of the responses given by the lecturers that highlighted the fairness of the student-evaluation exercise when they pointed out that the assessment was fair. It might however be impossible to grade a 4 for all round on relationships with students since discipline might be misconstrued as unfair. One respondent points out that his/her evaluation was fair and consistent with his/her expectation. Also, there was an acknowledgment that the points rated as low are understood and the reasons thereof. The respondents also noted that the evaluations were objective and need to be frequently done to improve teaching and learning.

Furthermore, some participating lecturers declared that the student-lecturer evaluations were of great value. These lecturers agreed with the observations made by the students and pledged to improve accordingly. The lecturers in this category pointed out that the evaluation was of great value, that they agree with the student scoring and that the assessment was in order. Some respondents point out that they had always put much effort to prepare well and deliver informative lectures, that they accept the criticism as being useful and point out that the students' evaluation and facilitator's comments will be used to improve their teaching and facilitation roles. In short, the lecturers' comments highlight the great value of insights drawn from students' observations as contained in the student-lecturer evaluation results.

The participating lecturers also commented on the entire evaluation process. Their comments made reference to diverse issues pertaining to how the academic advisors and students handled the exercise. Some respondents commended the academic advisors who conducted these sessions for their professionalism and support. Some respondents were also impressed by the whole process of evaluation and appreciate all the comments they have received. In addition, some respondents note that the assessment gave them a chance to know their strengths and weaknesses as lecturers. Also, one respondent acknowledged that it is not always that he/she uses multi-media but believe in writing on the board

but in view of student inputs, he/she was prepared to improve. Overall the idea of assessment is good for the environment. Therefore, comments in this section demonstrate that the exercise unearthed strengths and weaknesses some lecturers were not aware of. Also, the way the evaluations were done got thumbs up.

The developmental role of student-lecturer evaluations came to the fore through the lecturers who submitted that they learnt a lot from the exercise and undertook to improve their facilitation roles. Comments in this section note that student-lecturer evaluations should be practised continuously as it helps in the development of one's skills; that this is an important development process and one wish for all staff members to be evaluated in such a manner and that student-lecturer evaluation is a good activity because it brings about development in both the students and lecturers.

The theme of strengths of student-lecturer evaluations were delineated by the participating lecturers. They highlighted that students are able to point their lecturers to some of their challenges or limitations as well as motivate them to continue doing well. Comments to this effect note that student-lecturer evaluation is a very useful tool, that this exercise is a normal practice in many universities; that it is a great tool which should be utilised in future to create a proper teaching and learning environment and that the evaluation exercise is constructive and addresses the complacency that develops as practice continues. Therefore, the evaluation is an eye opener which digs out hidden aspects of teaching and learning process especially from lecturers' point of view.

The study also got clues on the suitable theme pertaining to the timing of student-lecturer evaluations. It emerges that the evaluations should be done after a reasonable time of teaching would have been given. The proposed time was after four teaching weeks. Comments given here make reference to the fact that the evaluation was conducted on the 3rd meeting with students and not much had been done; that no assessment had been done by the time of the evaluation; that as a new lecturer, there was little time to have known the students. Therefore, evaluations of this nature should not be done too early in the first semester especially for the first year students but should be carried out mid-semester after establishing rapport between students and lecturers.

The responses also focused on the theme of procedure that was followed during the administration of the student-lecturer evaluations. The comments point out that the exercise (evaluation) was not overly disruptive; that the process was well undertaken and will yield good results; that the exercise should be explained thoroughly to students and that the process was carried out fairly and meticulously.

Related with the preceding, the theme of administration of the evaluations was raised by some respondents. Reference is here made to remarks that the evaluation was conducted against a background of chaos; that the validity of this exercise must be questioned; that time was short for students to complete the questionnaire and that the class had just been reshuffled. Furthermore, indications were made that the whole questionnaire needs to be reviewed and rearranged.

This study notes that some lecturers' responses identified the theme of challenges that they felt strongly influenced the resultant student-lecturer evaluations. The militating factors include the students' supposed shyness, lack of commitment, lateness to class among others. In this regard, they note that students are shy to answer questions or to express their opinions; that the course is a minor for the students who evaluated me; that most of the time they do not attend lectures because they claim that this course is clashing with their majors and that the students did not like my assessment in the test. Other lecturers note that the problem is that in my class I have two groups of students in the first year and the second year.

It also emerged that some of the challenges are lecturer centered as well as administrative. In this regard responses suggest that some lecturers are teaching subjects they are not experts in; that the class that evaluated one was not the level he/she usually teaches; that class size makes class discussion difficult and that the class does not have easy access to the venues due to late opening of venues by security personnel. Also, the course was not timetabled, it therefore started late. In addition, the Science building did not give accommodation to use other modes of teaching like PowerPoint and overhead projector and only chalk and talk were resorted to.

In addition, some lecturers submit that their rating might have been influenced by the non-applicability of some questionnaire items. Refer-

ence has been made to the need of questionnaire items that are suitable for all disciplines and their teaching learning approaches. Also, remarks were made based on the allocated time and class sizes. Comments here speak to need to improve questionnaire according to each faculty, that some items in the questionnaire are objectionable and that the instrument is more on traditional teaching than PBL approach.

In like manner, some lecturers who were given marks they regard as below their expectations had a lot to say seemingly in their defense. Below are some of the remarks made under the theme of self-defense. Some lecturers challenged students to provide details of the days that they were not punctual. Some declared that they are known for fair assessment practices; that they give excessive attention to students who perform poorly and may be identified as students at risk; that their policy for consultation is that students are allowed to see me in my office anytime and that those who come are assisted. Some suggest that the comments were not fair as they had always called upon students who have performed poorly to discuss their outcome and take remedial steps; have always tried to conduct practicals after. One lecturer commented, *I have covered the theory and that outcomes are assessed and outcomes are stated and assessed as indicated.* The affected lecturers thought that the concerns come due to the fact that the classes were large and that as coordinators, they sometimes did administrative work together with their teaching and that students wanted to be spoon fed.

With reference to lecturer preparation, it emerged that induction of lecturers should be scheduled at the beginning of the year or during examination time; that workshops should be arranged at the beginning of the year not during class session times and that sometimes as new lecturers, we are not aware of what is expected of us. Being assessed in the first semester as a new lecturer, it is not fair as you are not sure or don't even know you have to spell out learning outcomes each day before giving a presentation.

After student-lecturer evaluation results were handed back, the following is what many lecturers pledged to do:

- ♦ *During second semester, I will encourage my students to work together during lessons.*

- ♦ *I will refer students performing poorly to where they can get support.*
- ♦ *Job well done and I will attend to all mentioned shortcomings them.*
- ♦ *I would like academic advisors to assist me in the second semester concerning the use of internet and researching for practical sessions.*
- ♦ *It seems not all of the students have done computer science.*
- ♦ *Help in motivating repeating students.*
- ♦ *I intend to introduce Supplemental Instruction next year for this module because of the level of understanding on the subject matter.*
- ♦ *Can academic advisors notify us by e-mail about workshops instead of posters only?*
- ♦ *I would like to attend workshops to improve my performance.*

The remarks above shows that the exercise was worthwhile as it brought change to many participating lecturers. Now that they were assisted in identifying their limitations and those of their students, it emerges that concrete improvements plans were put in place.

DISCUSSION

From the results, student-lecturer evaluations are seen as important and the need for all lecturers to participate in the exercise is encouraged. These observations resonate with findings by Kember et al. (2002) who report that the evaluation of teaching by students is beneficial as the feedback obtained through the questionnaires contributes to improving the quality of teaching. The student-lecturer evaluations have been described as 'useful tool', 'great tool', 'normal practice', 'learning experience', 'eye opener' and 'constructive' by the lecturers who participated in this study. As Murray (2005) puts it, research indicates that student ratings are adequate in terms of reliability, in that ratings of a given instructor are reasonably stable or consistent across courses, years, rating forms and groups of raters. Student feedback provides important evidence for assessing quality, it can be used to support attempts to improve quality, and it can be useful to prospective students (Richardson 2005).

One major finding of the study as shown in the results relates to the timing of conducting the evaluations. The feeling of the lecturers is

that evaluations should not be conducted too soon after commencement of teaching as students and lecturers need enough time to know each other and build the necessary teaching and learning rapport. This feeling by lecturers in the study is in-tandem with the views by the Teaching and Learning Centre (2005) which advises lecturers to give students enough time to settle in the courses before evaluation to enable them to give meaningful feedback.

In terms of procedure, while some lecturers pointed out that the exercise (evaluation) was not overly disruptive; that the process was well undertaken and will yield good results and that the process was carried out fairly and meticulously, others has reservations as shown in the results section. There were remarks that the evaluation was conducted against a background of chaos; that the validity of this exercise must be questioned; that time was short for students to complete the questionnaire and that the class had just been reshuffled. From earlier studies, Marsh (1987) and Thornton et al. (2010) note that some professors contend that, rather than measuring learning, these evaluations may be influenced by factors such as the professor's charisma, charm, ability to entertain, easy grading policies and low workload. Teachers with excellent communication skills and charisma but with little intellectual content tend to receive positive assessment, as opposed to those who are not imbued with such charm (Urua 2012).

In the results, a lot of talk emerged around items in the questionnaire. The need to have questionnaire items explained in detail to students and lecturers was noted. The comments reckon that some students misunderstood the questionnaire and terms like multi-media' and that students and lecturers need to have a workshop on the questionnaire before it can be administered. In this regard, Marsh (2007) argues that poorly worded or inappropriate items in a questionnaire will not provide useful information, while scores averaged across an ill-defined assortment of items offer no basis for knowing what is being measured.

The study got much talk by lecturers who seem bent on vilifying the results around areas pertaining to punctuality, fair assessment, excessive student attention, the place of theoretical and practical, outcomes, class size, balance of teaching and administrative tasks and the alleged spoon feeding and lack of preparation. On the

issue of fair assessment, Cogito (2012) observe that students angry about a grade they regard as unfair might be inclined to punish an instructor, and students happy about their grade might feel inclined to reward a teacher on misplaced grounds. In this regard, Machingambi and Wadesango (2011) recommend that student evaluations of teaching must always be triangulated with other multidimensional evaluation methods so as to increase validity and reliability in the evaluation of teaching effectiveness in higher education. In the same vein, Iyamu and Aduwa (2005) assert that there are really many questions about the reliability, validity and utility of student evaluation of teachers, especially when they are for personnel decision and other summative purposes. In contrast however, Marsh and Roche (1997) argue that under appropriate conditions, student evaluations of teaching are relatively unaffected by variables hypothesised as potential biases, such as grading leniency, class size and work load.

Much research has accumulated over the past two decades concerning issues of the validity and reliability of various evaluation instruments (Albrecht 1981; Marsh 1984). More specifically, a limited number of studies have been conducted in which students' knowledge of the uses of teaching evaluations (for example, improvement of teaching vs. salary/promotion/tenure considerations) was manipulated (Feldman 1979). It appears that informing students that teaching evaluations will be used for official purposes such as salary, promotion, and tenure considerations tends to produce more favorable ratings than if they are told that the purpose is for instructor feedback and course improvement. However, across studies, the advantage for 'official purposes' has tended to be fairly small, and not always in this direction. More positive ratings have been interpreted by some as reflecting a leniency error (for example, Wherry 1952). However, Feldman (1979) points out that another explanation is possible. Hypothetically, when students are informed that teaching evaluations are to be used for official purposes, students may be less biased in their ratings.

CONCLUSION

The findings of the study show that insights from student-lecturer evaluations are an important source of information for university teach-

ing staff and administration to consider in their quest to improve on the quality of university teaching and learning moves that can help improve on throughput rates. The lecturers' comments highlight the value of insights drawn from students observations as contained in the student-lecturer evaluation results. Results show that the exercise unearthed strengths and weaknesses some lecturers were not aware of. From the study, a cautionary conclusion can also be drawn, which is that, there is need for adequate training and conscientisation of lecturers on the rationale and benefits of obtaining feedback from students in order to remove the tendency to be defensive.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of the results and conclusions above the authors recommend the following;

- ♦ The evaluation instrument should be adequately explained to the students to make them understand both the terminology and reasons for completing it before responding to it.
- ♦ Enough time is given to new academics to adapt to the university systems before such evaluations are administered.
- ♦ Adequate training and conscientisation of lecturers on the rationale and benefits of obtaining feedback from students in order to remove the tendency to be defensive.
- ♦ The use of student feedback on lecturers teaching be used as just one among many other lenses for reflecting on teaching practice such as, for example, peer observations and external examiner reports to mention but a few.

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