

Rethinking the Process of the Student Evaluation of Teaching*

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Abstract. *Students are usually required to complete teacher assessment surveys (SET – student evaluation of teaching) at higher education institutions around the globe. In some countries, focus is put on assessing teaching effectiveness with a view to influencing pay and promotion, but in fact such assessments are a part of broader quality management systems, with focus on enhancing teaching and as a reference for the creation of teaching practice. Within the DIP2Future project in this paper, some experiences and important points regarding the process of student assessment of teaching are highlighted which should be considered and discussed. The primary aim is to render such evaluations purposeful (for student, staff, management of the faculty), but still practical and feasible.*

Keywords. quality of teaching, SET, student evaluation

1 Introduction

The project DIP2Future is implemented by the Faculty of Organization and Informatics Varaždin (FOI) in partnership with the Department of Informatics, University of Rijeka (OIRI). Within the project four new study programs are being developed: 1) Data systems and artificial intelligence, 2) Management of information security and privacy systems, 3) Distributed and interactive systems and 4) Management of business systems transformation and innovation.

The aim of the project is to develop new study programs in the field of ICT in which the demand for appropriate skills and competencies of ICT professionals in accordance with the requirements of the labour market and trends in technological progress will be met. One of the results of the DIP2Future project refers to the quality of teaching and the improvement of the system of student surveys on the quality of teaching and other forms of evaluation at the faculties.

2 Background

2.1 Teaching as a Service

Education/teaching is, along with research and knowledge transfer/contribution to the community, the major pillar of the activities of a higher education institution.

According to the ISO 21001 (2018), the management (system) principles of institutions dealing with education should include, among others:

- focus on the needs of learners and other beneficiaries;
- learning-centeredness;
- engagement of learners and interested parties;
- improvement;
- evidence-based decisions.

The standard (ISO 21001, 2018) promotes “the adoption of a process approach when developing, implementing and improving the effectiveness of a quality management system, to enhance learner and other beneficiary satisfaction by meeting learner and other beneficiary requirements”.

Furthermore, according to the ISO 21001 (2018), the application of the process approach in management (system) enables:

1. “understanding and consistency in meeting requirements;
2. the consideration of processes in terms of added value;
3. the achievement of effective process performance;
4. improvement of processes based on evaluation of data and information.”

The application of assessment methodologies of the educational effectiveness and the results of the assessment of the educational effectiveness are elements of each process, including the process of teaching.

In the context of the aforementioned, it could be emphasized that:

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- learners are the main beneficiary of the education /teaching process i.e. service customer;
- the needs of learners which relate to the teaching process/education as a service should be satisfied;
- the process approach in the management of teaching/education and evidence-based decisions are the way to meet the needs of learners (and other stakeholders) effectively; and finally,
- the relationship with learners as the main beneficiaries/customers should be of high quality; learners should be engaged/involved in all processes of teaching and learning (education) management and decision making (joint decision making) to ensure that their needs are well defined and met, and educational processes are managed well and improved constantly, continually.

The high quality of teaching (process) is one the main indicators that a (higher) education institution is close to fulfilling the needs of learners/students. This is the reason that Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET) may have greater importance/weight than peer/expert and/or self-evaluation of teaching.

According to Uttl, White and Gonzalez (2017), “Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET) ratings are used to evaluate faculty teaching effectiveness based on an assumption that students learn more from highly rated professors”. In (Scheepers, 2019) it is stated that “when SETs are used, it often serves not only as an instrument in the quality control cycle, but also as instrument for teachers’ individual performance review”.

For many years, student evaluation of teaching has been in the focus of many studies dealing with different factors which may influence the SET ratings/results. For example, based on those studies Pounder (2007) discusses factors which relate to student (Gender effect, Student’s academic level and maturity, Students punishing their teachers via SET scores), teacher (Gender, Age, experience, rank, Teachers’ influencing tactics, Teachers’ behavioural traits) and course (Grading, Class size, Course content, Class timing).

Many factors affecting SET as well as many doubts and issues connected with SET in different educational systems/environments were motivation to begin this research and discuss teacher/teaching evaluation in this paper.

2.2 The Quality of Teaching

According to the ISO 21001 (2018), tools for evaluation in Educational Organizations in general may include: Cost Analysis; Satisfaction Surveys; Suggestion Schemes; Complaint and Appeal Systems; Impact Evaluation; Needs Analysis; Statistical Data Analysis; Focus Groups; Self-Assessment; Peer

Assessment; Boards and Committees to analyse performance; SWOT; Brainstorming; Quality Methodologies: TQM, Lean Six Sigma, Kaizen.

When it comes to the quality of teaching it could be evaluated by students (student evaluation), by peers/experts (peer/expert evaluation) or by the teacher/educator himself/herself (self-assessment) among which a student evaluation of teaching/teacher work is the most common.

According to the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG, 2015) “quality, whilst not easy to define, is mainly a result of the interaction between teachers, students and the institutional learning environment”. Furthermore, “quality assurance should ensure a learning environment in which the content of programs, learning opportunities and facilities are fit for purpose”. In the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG, 2015) it is stated that “the heart of all quality assurance activities are the twin purposes of accountability and enhancement” which together “create trust in the higher education institution’s performance”.

“A successfully implemented quality assurance system will provide information to assure the higher education institution and the public of the quality of the higher education institution’s activities (accountability) as well as provide advice and recommendations on how it might improve what it is doing (enhancement)” (ESG, 2015).

In the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG, 2015), standard 1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment refers the most to the content of student evaluations of the quality of teaching (and learning), stressing that “the implementation of student-centred learning and teaching

- respects and attends to the diversity of students and their needs, enabling flexible learning paths;
- considers and uses different modes of delivery, where appropriate;
- flexibly uses a variety of pedagogical methods;
- regularly evaluates and adjusts the modes of delivery and pedagogical methods;
- encourages a sense of autonomy in the learner, while ensuring adequate guidance and support from the teacher;
- promotes mutual respect within the learner-teacher relationship;
- has appropriate procedures for dealing with students’ complaints”.

So, student evaluation of teaching/teachers is the best way to gain insight into the teaching process/teachers’ performance and to identify possible improvements.

2.3 Evaluation of the Quality of Teaching in the Higher Education in Croatia

Evaluation methods are used at higher education institutions in the Republic of Croatia to assess the work of teachers. These evaluation methods belong to the area of quality assurance systems within which quality assurance measures and activities are carried out. The area of quality assurance and improvement is regulated by rules and procedures, including the procedure of evaluation and assessment of teachers' work.

In the Republic of Croatia, the regulation covering the area of quality assurance is the Quality Assurance in Science and Higher Education Act. Said act regulates quality assurance and improvement in science and higher education through initial accreditation, re-accreditation, thematic evaluation and external independent periodic evaluation of the internal quality assurance system (audit). It also defines the status, activities and organization of the Agency for Science and Higher Education as public institutions in the Republic of Croatia, which takes care of quality assurance and improvement in science and higher education, and the role of other bodies in the Republic of Croatia that take care of quality assurance and improvement in science and higher education. The provisions of the Act apply to public and private higher education institutions, public scientific institutes and other scientific organizations founded by the Republic of Croatia, as well as private scientific institutes and other legal entities registered in the Register of Scientific Organizations.

At the level of universities in the Republic of Croatia, the following are related to the evaluation of the quality of teachers' work:

- the Ordinance on the quality assurance system at the University of Zagreb,
- the Ordinance on the quality assurance and improvement system of the University of Rijeka,
- the Manual on Quality Assurance at the University of Zagreb, University of Rijeka,
- the Ordinance on quality assurance of the Faculty of Organization and Informatics
- the Ordinance on the quality assurance and improvement system of the Department of Informatics of the University of Rijeka.

The Ordinance on the Quality Assurance System at the University of Zagreb regulates the goal, purpose, areas of evaluation and organization of the quality assurance system at the University of Zagreb. The goal of quality assurance is to build mechanisms to promote quality and achieve its highest level in educational, scientific and artistic activities, and administrative activities at the University.

The Ordinance on the quality assurance and improvement system of the University of Rijeka prescribes the area of evaluation, structure and

operation of the quality assurance and improvement system of the University of Rijeka. The goal of the quality system is to promote a culture of quality and the development of institutional mechanisms for systematic evaluation, with the long-term purpose of ensuring and improving quality and promoting high standards of professional and vocational development of participants in all areas of the University.

The evaluation of teachers' work is based on the results of student assessment of the teaching process, and the procedure is prescribed at the level of each university. Student surveys examine students' opinions about the work of individual teachers. The purpose of these surveys is to improve the quality of teaching and analysis of results, which should be aimed at highlighting good examples.

The evaluation of the quality of teaching work of teachers and associates of a certain subject as well as the engagement of students in a certain subject takes place in order to improve the work of teachers and teaching in each individual subject on the basis of this evaluation. The goal of conducting a student survey is to identify areas and activities that need to be improved or changed.

Universities in the Republic of Croatia conduct surveys as an evaluation method by which students evaluate the work of their teachers and surveys by which they assess their overall study experience. This gives students the opportunity to give feedback and their opinions.

The aim of the survey is to evaluate the teaching work of teachers in a particular course. From the academic year 2011/2012 at the University of Zagreb, teaching evaluation was carried out according to a three-year Revised Cyclic Survey Plan. According to a decision of the Senate on October 16, 2015, each faculty/department is obliged to carry out the evaluation of teaching using the paper-pencil method once every three years. The survey is conducted using the Teacher Assessment Questionnaire, which is also available in an English version, and the accompanying Control sheet. Considering that an increasing number of foreign students are studying at the University of Zagreb, from academic year 2012/2013 the English version of the Survey is also available.

In both semesters the survey is conducted during the last two to three weeks of the semester and, for courses taken alternately, during the last week of teaching the course. The rules and instructions related to the implementation of the Survey are regulated by the Student Survey Implementation Plan, Instructions for Conducting the Student Survey, Instructions to the Interviewer and Recommendations for Handling University Survey Results for Systematic Reporting to Teachers and Students.

There are more methods that can be used in order to receive information about the quality of teaching: self-evaluation and peer evaluation. With the help of these methods, the teacher can obtain information from a completely different perspective. Using all the above

methods, information is obtained about the work of an individual teacher and what is important for students.

In order to self-evaluate their own teaching work, teachers have the opportunity to synthesize their own findings by filling out an appropriate form that concerns three aspects of teaching: teaching skills, motivation and communication, and preparation and organization.

At the University of Rijeka, the evaluation of teachers' work is possible on the basis of different procedures or a combination of the same. Evaluation is carried out in the following forms: evaluation of teachers' work by students, self-evaluation of teachers (teacher evaluates his/her work independently), evaluation of teachers' work by other teachers, evaluation of assistants, postdoctoral fellows and mentors, analysis of study success, assessment of availability and suitability of teaching materials and institutionally coordinated direct regular communication with student representatives.

The evaluation of teachers' work is based on the results of the student assessment of the teaching process. It is conducted on the basis of standardized questionnaires at the University level (for the purpose of comparability), supplemented, if necessary, with the specifics of work at each faculty. Internal evaluation of teachers' work is carried out regularly, at least every three years, i.e. for teachers whose evaluation results are used in the process of election to a higher title or re-election, at least twice during the period between elections to a particular scientific-teaching or teaching title.

From all the above, it is evident that the universities in the Republic of Croatia have organized procedures for evaluating the work of teachers in accordance with the positive regulations of the Republic of Croatia.

2.4 Student Evaluation of Quality of Teaching -The Case of the Faculty of Organization and Informatics

Student evaluation of the teaching quality at the Faculty of Organization and Informatics is done, in accordance with all procedures defined by the University of Zagreb/The University Office for Quality Management, every third year as a paper-based survey. However, it has been performed every year for teachers who want this because of personal reasons (e.g. checking the effects of new methodologies/course contents introduced), or as one of the corrective measures taken based on the results of previous student survey results to assure the quality of teaching. It should be emphasized that the student survey of teacher evaluation is anonymous and voluntary (for students, as respondents). On the other side, the teachers should, for the purpose of their academic advancement (promotion), have and provide the valid (more than 50% of completed survey forms out of the total students involved in at least one course they

teach), which sometimes could be challenging to accomplish and satisfy (the overall teacher grade greater than 3) results of the student surveys of their teaching.

At the level of the Faculty of Organization and Informatics, implementation of the student evaluation survey is managed by the Vice-dean for Teaching and Students (in its function responsible for the area of quality assurance too) and the Student Survey Implementation Committee (consisting of three members), with the help of interviewers, mostly from the ranks of assistants (which all, of course, sign the Data Confidentiality Agreement/Statement).

Upon invitation by the University Office for Quality Management, the Vice-dean for Teaching and Students together with the Student Survey Implementation Committee prepares the Student Survey Plan and asks all the teachers for which the survey would be done to check, comment and/or change the Plan. The Plan is sent to the University Office for Quality Management for coding. A code refers to the pair "teacher-course" denoting for which teacher the survey would be done on which of his/her courses. Coding ensures data protection and privacy during the survey results handling. The Student Survey Implementation Committee asks the University Office for Quality Management for paper-based survey materials which encompass the standard teacher evaluation survey forms (the questionnaire), control sheets and envelopes for protecting/storing the filled in survey forms.

The teacher evaluation standard survey form is available both in Croatian (UNIZG-a) and English (UNIZG-b) language versions, consisting of the three parts:

1. A-part: General information on the student – encompassing the student-respondent's gender, regularity of the student-respondent's attendance at this particular teacher's classes, the level of interest of the student-respondent in the topic of the course at the beginning, the student-respondent's prior grade average, and the student-respondent's expected grade in the course;
2. B-part: Teacher evaluation for the given course – encompassing the ten statements (for which students are expected to use the Likert scale from *1 - I fully disagree* to *5 - I fully agree* to evaluate how well they (the statements) describe the teacher's work, or to use the option *I cannot evaluate*, referring to the teacher's clear definition of learning outcomes and what is expected of students, structuring of his/her classes and efficient use of available time, clarity and understandability of the material's presentation, use of various teaching materials to raise the quality of teaching (e.g. e-learning, pre-prepared materials), methods, examples and exercises which facilitate the achievement of learning outcomes, possessing good communication skills and creating a pleasant working atmosphere,

motivation and conscientiousness in performing his/her tasks, treating the students fairly and respectfully, regularity of holding his/her classes and punctuality when beginning the classes, and finally, his/her overall evaluation;

3. C-part: Comments on the teacher's performance – in the form of answers to the questions: “What did you like most about this teacher's work in this course?” and “What you didn't like especially about the teacher's work in this course or what improvements would you propose in order to enhance the quality of teaching?”.

The control sheet (UNIZG-c, n.d.) is intended for interviewers and it encompasses ID (identification) of the teacher, i.e. the code for the pair “teacher-course” which is mandatory to identify to which teacher-course the survey form(s) belongs, and more detailed data on the institution/department and (year of) study programs of the course, the teacher and who (which interviewers) and when did the survey and how many survey forms have been filled in.

The Student Survey Implementation Committee prepares the student survey implementation plan (the survey schedule - exact dates, time and place of the survey for each course) and forms the group of interviewers. For the group of interviewers, an education is usually organized to introduce them to the survey's aims, procedures and documents and to assure consistent and high-quality survey implementation.

The surveys are scheduled, according to the University Office for Quality Management, during the last two weeks of teaching on the course for which teachers are evaluated. Therefore, it could be quite demanding for the students as are invited to complete many survey forms in a short time period.

The Student survey implementation plan (the survey schedule) is published on the web page of the Faculty and teachers are also invited to inform and motivate their own students to participate in the survey via the e-learning platform on which each course, in its online version, exists.

The survey is conducted in such a way that the interviewers come to the beginning or end of the lecture and follow the prescribed procedure to get completed survey forms which are placed and sealed in an envelope for each teacher separately and immediately in front of the students. All envelopes with the completed survey forms are collected and stored safely and when the survey plan is fulfilled and finished all are delivered when requested to the University Office for Quality Management together with the short data on the number of envelopes and surveys done.

The results of the student surveys are available to the responsible person (in the case of Faculty of Organization and Informatics it is the Vice-dean for Teaching and Students) which invites all teachers to examine them personally and analyse and reflect on them. It should be emphasized that the individual

results of teacher evaluations are available only to the responsible persons i.e. to the Vice-dean, Dean and to the teachers themselves (each teacher sees only his/her survey results). The Vice-dean prepares the cumulative results of the survey which are presented to the Faculty Management Board, to the Quality Management Board as well as to the Faculty Council (to all teachers). The results are discussed at the Quality Management Board, which, according the University prescribed procedure, gives their Opinion, Recommendations and Action Plan based on the Results of the Teacher Evaluation Survey and publishes it on the Faculty web pages. In the document, the action plan refers to poorly rated teachers with overall scores of 3 or lower (as defined in the University procedure) and usually it specifies improvement measures as well as repetition of the student survey next (each) academic year to monitor the results.

When needed for personal, academic enhancement/promotion, the teachers ask the responsible person (Vice dean for Teaching and Students) to issue a Certificate in Institutional Research of the Quality of Teaching in the prescribed form for each course for which he/she has been evaluated. Additionally, at the Faculty of Organization and Informatics, the teachers are advised to ask the Faculty Quality Board for its opinion on teacher work based on the student survey results and scans of the completed survey forms which, in this case, the teacher displays to the Quality Board.

In this case, the teacher voluntarily gives, to the Quality Management Board, insight into the results of student surveys and scanned individual completed survey forms needed to prepare and issue the opinion. The opinion contains an overview of the results of student surveys that have been conducted for the teacher in question in the last three years.

3 Problem Formulation and Research Methods

Based on the experience the authors gained with teacher evaluation student surveys during the last few years some initial issues may be identified:

1. the dual nature of the student survey for the evaluation of teachers – voluntary for students and mandatory for teachers when asking for academic enhancement/promotion;
2. motivation of students to participate in the survey and reasons for not participating;
3. implementation of the survey – in a quite short period at the end of the semester which could be very demanding, stressful and tiring for students;
4. questionable authenticity of the survey and its results (in some cases, for example on the courses with many teachers/teaching assistants, students evaluated a wrong teacher);

- questionable purpose of the survey from the perspective of students who sometimes express suspicion that something is being done/changed based on the results of the survey.

These initial issues identified have been the trigger for starting the research on the perception of the student survey for teacher evaluation and finding approaches for its potential improvement. The inductive approach (Tay & Jebb, 2016) to scale creation was used where people involved in SET were asked to describe concepts and these descriptions were derived in order to form the items. To evaluate each of the items for content relevance, representativeness, and technical quality (content quality) we used evaluation by experts and evaluation by the population (Boateng, Neilands, Frongillo, Melgar-Quiñonez & Young, 2018).

4 Result – SET Indicators

The aim is to gather information on experiences and examples of good practice related to the treatment and evaluation of the teaching quality in order to define SET indicators for overall evaluation improvement.

4.1 Information on Experiences and Examples of Good Practice Regarding SET

A questionnaire was prepared in order to systematically collect data. The questions are organized into three parts:

- organization of evaluation of the quality of teaching and work of teachers at the university level;
- organization of evaluation of the quality of teaching and teacher work at the faculty level;
- general purpose of the survey.

Organization of evaluation of the quality of teaching and work of teachers at the university level refers to current methods used to evaluate quality of teaching which are defined by the university/faculty. There have been 16 indicators defined:

- the ordinance defines the implementation of the evaluation of the quality of teaching and the work of teachers;
- instructions for surveying and conducting other methods of evaluation, methods of reporting and acting on the basis of survey results;
- evaluation documents, e.g. questionnaires/online forms, instructions for interviewers, survey plans, instructions for handling survey results;
- methods of evaluation of the quality of teaching and work of teachers are defined/prescribed and

used (student surveys, peer-evaluation, self-evaluation);

- the assessment of the quality of teaching identified as one of the criteria for promotion /selection to a certain scientific-teaching title;
- whether completing the survey on the quality of teaching and teacher work is mandatory for students or voluntary;
- forms of the evaluation (e.g. paper-based survey or online);
- the frequency of evaluation - every year or cyclically (every 2, 3 years);
- the autonomy of the faculty/department in organizing/defining and conducting evaluations;
- method and extent of publishing the results of evaluation of individual faculties/ departments;
- the average results of the entire university and the results of other faculties/departments;
- ranking lists of faculties/departments according to the summary results;
- procedures for poorly rated teachers and for excellently rated teachers;
- the range of grades and the minimum acceptable level of quality of teaching;
- publishing evaluation results to students;
- access to detailed evaluation data.

Organization of the evaluation of the quality of teaching and teacher work at the faculty level refers to the practices that departments or faculties prescribe with the purpose of improving the quality of teaching.

The third group of questions General purpose of the survey refers to the perception of the purposefulness of the survey. Here, it is examined whether a particular department or faculty conducts the survey of students and teachers about the purposefulness and effectiveness of conducting evaluations and improvement activities based on evaluation results. It should be determined:

- whether individual evaluation results are monitored (for each teacher) continuously and at what level (at the level of subjects, departments/faculties);
- whether and what corrective measures are being taken for poorly graded teachers;
- whether and how excellently rated teachers are rewarded;
- are corrective measures being taken to improve the identified poor elements of teaching quality at the faculty level;
- whether the results of the corrective measures taken are checked and evaluated. Are students informed about the corrective measures taken and their results.

5 Conclusion

There is a range of literature that defines the advantages or lack thereof of SET, and discuss if it is necessary to change or present the reasons why such research should be abandoned. Jones et al. (Jones, Gaffney-Rhys & Jones, 2014) provide a review of previous ideas on student evaluation of teaching (SET) outcomes in higher education institutions (HEIs), with special emphasis on possible validity problems and concerns that should be discussed by HEI decision-makers before evaluating and summarizing survey

findings. Recommendations regarding SET data collection include:

- to attend the workshop on SET to gain insights into the reason for SET, its application and their obligations regarding it;
- avoid utilizing mixed SET data collection approaches (e.g. online / offline);
- use various tools / methods to get input, use focus groups or peer-review;
- ensure that the students who complete the SETs can be identified and their anonymity preserved.

This paper introduces activities which are part of the DIP2Future project's initiative of the planning the improvements in student evaluations of teaching. The primary aim is to render such evaluations more purposeful (for pupils, staff and management of the faculty), but still practical and feasible.

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