

A Critique of the Methods of Evaluating the Competency of Lecturers in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions

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ABSTRACT

This paper contends that the use of research publications and paper presentation at conferences as the main performance indicators for lecturers is counter-productive. This view is informed by the fact that the use of these criteria has resulted in the negligence of the primary assignment of teaching by some teachers. This paper seeks to accomplish two objectives, that is, to review the procedure used to evaluate lecturers in Nigeria tertiary institutions including colleges of education and highlights the weaknesses of this procedure. Secondly, to argue for the use of performance rating rather than excessive reliance on scholarly publications as means of weighing the efficiency of academic staff. The paper suggests how performance rating can be perfected.

Keywords: Students Rating, Evaluation Methods, Educators

INTRODUCTION

In this paper, the term teachers' trainer, and or teacher educators refer to lecturers in the universities and higher institutions whose specialty is teachers' education related subjects such as guidance and counselling, teaching methodology and developmental psychology. In essence, they are the lecturers mainly in faculties of education whose duty is to teacher students that graduates as teachers (Lash and Kirkpatrick, 1990). Mwira (1991) argued that "African universities have experienced serious decline in the last two decades. The symptoms of this decline include among others; poor performance in university examinations by students, reduced rigor in the recruitment and promotion of staff, reduced levels of research and publications output, and complaints by employers regarding the inability of university graduates to perform".

The strength of good education in any educational institution depends on the quality of the academic staff in that; there is no satisfactory substitute for competent staff that possesses sound educational philosophy and dynamic leadership (Anderson and Van Dyke, 2000). In order to maintain good quality staffing in the educational institutions, the trainers of the trainee staff should be of good quality. It is the process and methods of monitoring and evaluating the progress of these trainers that this paper is set to discuss.

Educational evaluation is a process of obtaining data necessary for forming judgment about the worth of any educational endeavour. Stufflebeam (1971) observed that evaluation is a process of delineating, obtaining and providing useful information for judging decision alternatives (Bernett, 1992). Hence in proposing his context, input, process and product (CIPP) evaluation model, he laid emphasis on decision making. Evaluation of teacher trainers

is an aspect of personnel evaluation. It falls under the type of evaluation which MacDonald (1987) calls autocratic evaluation, that is, an evaluation carried out as part of the activity of an academic establishment, which is performed by experts and is validated in terms of academic standards (Saint, 1995).

The standards used in evaluating the lecturers in Nigerian tertiary institutions today have failed to enhance the quality of performance and credibility of these educators because such standards tend to give low priority to teaching as noted by Oranu (1983) that describes the quality of teaching in Nigeria as apparently poor, and attributed this to the fact that teaching performance is never a recognized criterion when considering university teachers for promotion or reward. Emphasis is rather placed on research publications (Ofoegbu, 2001).

Evaluation has no universally acceptable definition. Many evaluators (Stake, 1962, Lewy, 1977, Criven, 1967, Stufflebean, 1967) have defined evaluation in various ways. According to Alkin (1970) "Evaluation is the process of ascertaining the decision to be made, selecting related information, and collecting and analyzing information in order to report summary data useful to decision makers in selecting among alternatives".

In education, evaluation is usually concerned with the analyses of results of performance of the teaching-learning process with a view to determining in a scientific manner the changes that occur in the reactions of the individual. Evaluation in itself is a distinct phase of performance process and it has to do with knowledge of the fundamental principles of testing of individuals in the workplace.

Evaluation as an intervention strategy has received significant attention in both academic and political circles. There is now more than ever before a great awareness about the potentials of evaluation in educational and social service programmes. There is still the dilemma among practitioners of evaluation about what strategies to adopt and indeed, how to institutionalize evaluation in a number of government programmes. Hence the upcoming evaluators in Africa and in the developing countries should evolve and create their own evaluation designs.

Evaluation is an 'information gathering process – the information is obtained for the purpose of aiding decision makers. The process of evaluation is that set of activities which will yield information that decision makers would find helpful. Information input is only of several pressures impinging on the decision makers. Little is known of the relationships among information, constraints and values in decision-making situations in education. A situation to provide the best education for most people in the educational system produces a problem.

The solution to this problem involves a number of decision situations each of which requires a wealth of information. For example, a teacher must decide what text will optimize the educational opportunity for his class. The teacher's personality and the constraints of time, cost and government policy affect the decisions. But so does information. Information about the text, about the class, about the teacher and about several other variables should have input into the decision process. It is the generation of this information that is the business of evaluation. It is referred to in this paper as the process of evaluation.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

The methods of Okoro (1991) involving the discussion on the need for sound educational judgments based on programme improvement; programme planning; decision making; accountability and personnel improvement. The discourse is therefore centred on evaluation of teachers' educators (lecturers).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Evaluation data helps to improve any programme when such data reveal areas of strength and weaknesses of a programme and based on these, suggestions are made on how to maintain the strengths and remove the deficiencies. Accountability demands from educational institutions are at the heart of educational evaluation. Such demands are in the areas of use of resources, roles of staff towards achieving the goals of the programme, as well as relating costs to benefits. In the area of personnel improvement, evaluation is used to detect areas of weaknesses of which a staff should improve on. It also helps in disclosing staff's areas of needs such as training or welfare needs.

The above are general purposes of programme evaluation, serves basically to (1) maintain educational standards and (2) improve quality. As a means of maintaining standards, such evaluation compares the performance of the staff with per-test standards and insists that the staff must meet these standards if he must gain his promotions, or even retain his tenure.

In the area of quality improvement, staff performance evaluation when thoroughly executed, discloses what skills and knowledge the staff have brought to teachers education vis-à-vis the skills and knowledge needed to meet the demands of producing effective and competent teachers. Maigul (1996) noted that performance evaluation results in quality improvement. Olaitan (1976) acknowledges that the evaluation system in education programme is useful for identifying deficiencies and strengths in personnel performance, thus helping personnel to improve their teaching.

Beside quality improvement and maintenance of standards, performance evaluation is one of keys to validating policies, plans and procedures operating within an organization (Walklin, 1992). The above functions coupled with the requirement that teachers educators should teach the teachers as they are expected to teach makes the evaluation of their performance a necessity.

There are methodological weakness in the current ways of evaluating the performance and progress of teachers' educators'. The evaluation of teachers' educators/trainers in Nigeria higher institutions is hitherto carried out by means of Annual Performance Evaluation Report (APER) part of which is completed by the evaluated personnel and the other part by his head of department, or unit head. This evaluation is carried out for the sole purpose of promotion. However, it does not actually take consideration of physical evaluation of individual staff progress performances during the period being evaluated.

Besides the personnel data of the evaluated staff, the main information required from the first part of the APER require personal information including: main duties; researches; ad-hoc duties; scholarly activities such as seminar, conferences, workshops, and courses attended; and, publications. These items of information are used to determine whether the staff satisfies two out of the four conditions on which the promotion of academic staff is said to be normally based. The two conditions are: Evidence of scholarly research publications; and evidence of effective service to the institution. The second part of the APER form is a five points rating scale to be completed by the supervisory head of the school/department; the scale contains ten items: output of work; reliability, initiative/ drive, punctuality, relations with others, appearance, morals, health and cost consciousness. The APER is designed to provide the authorities with information on evidence of effective teaching and evidence of good character, loyalty to the institution and personal integrity.

Some of the items in the rating scale are ambiguous and cannot be easily evaluated whereas; others are extraneous and irrelevant for instance, the section which seeks information on the physical outlook and appearance of staff has nothing to illustrate in terms of performance evaluation. Bennett (1992) argues that assessment of competency based on publication records is not enough to demonstrate the competency of the lecturers. Given the fact that academic excellence begins with excellence in teaching, evaluation of the teacher

should focus more on practical teaching skills rather than the exclusive assessment of other criteria.

Another weakness of the current evaluation method through the use of APER form is that it is not advisory in nature. The advisory role is important since in spite of the requirement that teacher educators should themselves be professionally trained teachers some of these educators are not trained to teach. Such untrained educators according to Wilson (1993) are seemingly employed to teach on the assumption that if they had done well in their own academic studies, they are thereby capable of training teachers to teach that subject effectively to children. The falsity of this assumption is evident by the fact that knowledge of subject matter is different thing from methodology of teaching and application of knowledge base. A good evaluation procedure should therefore make provision for advice to the staff on how to improve their competence in teaching.

It is undoubtedly plausible that, excellence in teaching is the principal objective of university education hence, any criteria for excellence in the evaluation of staff performance must be taken into consideration by making student rating a valid procedure (Saint, 1995). It is more valid than mere one-off assessment of staff using the APER form. Moses (1985) suggests that the evaluation of the competency of lecturers should include the measurement of competence in the relevant subject matter; communication skills; commitment to facilitating students learning; and, the degree of concern for individual students. Therefore, the best approach to the evaluation of teachers and lecturers should be the “students’ rating system” where the students should be surveyed as to determining the skills and competency of those that teach them.

Oranu (1983) remarked that students are the consumers of teaching and thus, are in a better position to evaluate teaching excellence. Menne (1974) suggests that: (a) Students are the most accurate raters; (b) Students rating generally agrees with peer ratings whether or not the peer rating procedure includes a class visit; and, (c) Administrators tend to be less accurate (because of fewer raters) and not as commonly agreeing with the ratings by peers and students.

Marsh (1988) approves students rating and argued that it is a source of diagnostic feedback to faculty about the effectiveness of their teaching; it is a measure of teaching effectiveness to be used in tenure/promotion decisions, and it serves as a source of information for students to use in the selection of courses/instructors. The fact that student rating provides feedback on teaching effectiveness means that it is a valid source of data for offering useful advice to staff on how to improve their teaching. It therefore serves both as an assessment and advisory roles.

The multidimensional nature of a well constructed student rating scale makes it a convenient source of information about a staff moral standing with his students than the APER form rating. The rating of the lecturers by the students on variables that have to do with their professional ethics will help to check such moral vices prevalent in our tertiary institutions as sexual harassment and commercialization of scores and grades.

The above merits of student ratings notwithstanding, some doubts have been raised over their validity, reliability, and generalization. Okoro (1991) for instance observes that students sometimes fill in what they think the teacher would like rather than how they feel about him. He also reasons that some teachers may treat students very leniently and may spend a lot of time joking with them in order to obtain favourable rating from them. The later reasoning is akin to what is known as “Dr. Fox Effect” i.e. the over-riding influence of instructor expressiveness on students’ evaluation of college/university teaching (Marsh, 1988).

The interpretation of this effect means that a lecturer who is very enthusiastic can entice favourable evaluation even though his lectures may lack meaningful content. Other factors believed to affect the validity of student rating according to Marsh include:

- (a) Prior subject interest which is said to make students give favourable ratings to courses that already attract their interest.
- (b) Workload-more favourable ratings are given to harder courses requiring more effort and time.
- (c) Purpose or rating-higher ratings are made if the evaluation is known to be used for promotion/tenure decisions.
- (d) Administrative conditions-ratings seem to be higher if the instructor is present or the 'rater' is not anonymous.
- (e) Expected grades-students seem to give higher ratings in courses they expect to make higher grades. (Marsh, 1988:184)

The extent to which the above factors believed to affect students' ratings is however a matter of controversy. In defense of the accuracy of student rating, Remmers (1964:367-368) found that students' evaluation is a useful, convenient, reliable and valid means of self supervision and self improvement for the teacher. According to Remmers, the followings are features of students' ratings:

- (a) Reliability of rating of teachers by students is a function of the number of raters in accordance with Spearman Brown prophecy formula. If 25 or more student ratings are averaged, they are as reliable as better educational and mental tests at present available.
- (b) Grades of students have little if any relationship to their ratings of instructors who assign the grades
- (c) Little, if any relationship between the students' ratings of the teachers and the difficulty of the course.
- (d) In a given college/university, wide and important departmental differences in teaching effectiveness may exist as judged by student opinion.
- (e) The sex of student raters bears little or no relationship to their ratings of teachers.
- (f) The cost in time and money of obtaining student ratings of teaching is low.
- (g) Popularity is extra class activities of the teacher are probably not appreciably related to students' ratings of that teacher.
- (h) More instructors than students have noticed improvement in their teachings as a result of student ratings even though students are more favourable than instructors to student ratings of instructors.

Generally, where the students' rating method is to be used, it is necessary to adopt the following steps:

- (a) When students are expected to evaluate a staff, the purpose of the evaluation needs not to be disclosed to them. Merely telling them that the information they supply will be used to enhance their opportunity to succeed suffices to secure their co-operation.
- (b) Students should be anonymous when evaluating a staff.
- (c) Any identity therefore that can help the rater to identify the rater should be avoided.
- (d) The evaluated staff should not be present while students are doing the rating. It is even better that he does not know when he will be evaluated.
- (e) The rating of a staff should be done by as many students that are taught by the staff and across all level of courses that the staff teaches. This will ensure that the penalty error committed by some raters is cancelled out by the generosity error committed by others. It will also check the effect of year of study of the raters (if any) on their ratings.

- (f) The rating scale should be multidimensional with distinct component of the variables being measured and clearly identified

CONCLUSION

The failure of the use of the annual performance evaluation report (APER) to obtain an objective assessment of teacher-educators has resulted in the advocacy of students' rating as a more effective and objective performance indicator. For students' rating to achieve this purpose there is the need for the teachers or lecturers to agree on what should be the appropriate professional values, behaviour and accomplishments that will constitute the major variables of the rating scale with which they will be assessed. This could be worked out at the level of the agencies responsible for coordinating the activities of various tertiary institutions in Nigeria such as the Nigeria University Commission, the National Commission for Colleges of Education etc.

In setting such a standard, greater attention should be paid to teaching effectiveness and the variables to be considered in this should include competence in subject matter; communication skills; commitment to facilitate students learning; concern for individual students; time consciousness among other things. Students' rating alone cannot however provide all the relevant information required to evaluate the lecturers. Hence, a supplementary instrument should be used to obtain information dealing with such aspects of professional development such as research publications and participation in academic conferences, workshops and seminars. Evidence of effective service to the institution outside the execution of academic responsibilities should only be a requirement so long as every member is given a fair chance to serve. Loyalty to the institution is ambiguous and should be eliminated from the evaluation instruments. The call for the use of student rating in staff evaluation has been a long time call. The benefits of this procedure have long been realized in the United States and Canada where the institute for Higher education collects these ratings.

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