Effects of using student and peer evaluation data on professional competence development of lecturers

by

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Abstract

The effects of student and peer evaluation on professional competence development of lecturers at Chinhoyi University of Technology were investigated. Purposive sampling was used to identify 31 lecturers who participated in this study. Data were collected using a structured and open-ended self-completion questionnaire. Thematic generation and descriptive statistics using SPSS version 16 were used for data analysis. Five principal areas of professional competences demonstrated through student and peer evaluation and utilisation of feedback were identified. They include general knowledge, in-depth knowledge, pedagogical knowledge and competencies, professional and collegial competencies, and, teaching and instructional competencies. The competencies are more visible at individual level. The study recommends that student evaluation feedback be given at the earliest possible time to benefit the concerned group of students and lecturers. There is also need to revise the student evaluation forms to capture the intent data as may be applicable to specific subject areas.

Key words: effective teaching; professional competence development; student evaluations; peer evaluations; student ratings; student feedback

INTRODUCTION

Educational institutions can only be responsive to students’ needs and improve effectiveness of student outcomes if they first establish what the students believe to be effective teaching (Barnes & Lock, 2010). Because students are at the receiving end of the teaching-learning process, that have perceptions of effective teaching as well as an effective teacher (Oregbeyen, 2010). To my knowledge, research has been conducted in Zimbabwean universities specifically to determine the effects of students and peer (lecturer to lecturer) evaluation outcomes on professional competence development of the latter. The effects of student and peer evaluations are taken here to mean a change at an individual, group, or organizational level as a result of engagement in some form of educational programme (Ellstrom & Kock, 2009; Phillips, 2003; Wilson, 2001; Kirkpatrick, 1996, 1998). The changes may apply to knowledge, skills, values, behaviours or some other aspect of human competence considered appropriate for quality improvement in teaching and learning of both lecturers and students respectively (Barnes & Lock, 2010). This general but wide-spread definition of student-peer evaluation is based on a view of teaching and learning as objective, goal-steered process with certain external, causally determined effects both for students and lecturers (Smith & Morris, 2012). Such effects may arise in the long or short term, be general or more task-specific, intended or unintentional, desirable or undesirable. For instance, Smith and Morris (2012) in their study made the following five observations among others:

• Many universities seeking feedback on courses and lecturers via surveys struggle to achieve a meaningful response from students, which is partly due to students being inundated with requests to complete surveys.
• Student representatives have indicated that students are not effectively engaged in the feedback process and, for some, providing feedback can be intimidating.
• Ideally students want the opportunity to express their views on course improvements at a time that their feedback benefits them directly.
• In-class student involvement in survey administration can increase commitment as they are stakeholders in the process.
• Effective course evaluation is necessary for universities to provide a clear base to demonstrate their ‘value’ to students.

Additionally, research findings suggest that student ratings do not wholly reflect actual teaching effectiveness (Shelvin, Banyard, Davies & Griffiths, 2000; Reckers, 1995). According to Shelvin et al, (2000) evaluations can be influenced by factors other than teaching ability such as student characteristics and the physical environment. In a study involving 200 lecturers drawn from five public universities in Nigeria, Iyamu and Aduwa-Ogbeba (2005), and elsewhere in South Africa, Machingambi & Wadesango (2011) found out that lecturers generally do not accept student evaluation, particularly when it is for summative purposes. A closer look at the tenor of arguments, however, despite the negative reactions given to student evaluations of lecturers’ teaching of the courses, these evaluations remain critical to professional development of the teacher (Iyamu, 1998; Machingambi & Wadesango, 2011). Some of the benefits of student evaluations rest in the feedback forms provide directly to instructors (Stanford University newsletter, 1997). Richmond (2003) and Clifford (1999) in Iyamu and Ogbeba (2005) state that student opinion is as important as it represents an important addition to the data customarily used to judge faculty competence. Similarly Stanford University newsletter endorses that student evaluations give an opportunity for lecturers to refine their courses and teaching practices as such provide students with better learning experiences. Machingambi & Wadesango (2011) in their study indicated that South African university lecturers invariably recognise the unique contributions that students as stakeholders can make towards fostering
the professional growth of lecturers. Furthermore, evaluations provide a means of participating between students and lecturers in teaching-learning process and raise the level of instruction (Eble, 1974).

With this background information, the question is: How can we measure and define the effects of both students and peer evaluations on professional competence development of lecturers in a reasonable way? A classification of effects, that is still widely used, was proposed by Kirkpatrick (1959; 1996) and further developed by Holton (1996) and Kraiger (2002). This classification is based on the distinction between four effects or levels of results, namely: (a) participants’ attitudes to and evaluation of, for instance, an education programme and its results; (b) effects on the individual level in the form of acquired knowledge or skills, but also, for instance, in the form of changed attitudes (e.g., attitude to the use of technology, ‘e-learning portals’); (c) effects, meaning that the individual becomes better at carrying out certain tasks (job performance); (d) effects in the form of improved performance at the business level, for example a work team’s performance or performance at the organizational level.

The relationship between these levels are considered complex and of an interactional character (Ellstrom & Kock, 2009; Gerber, Nel & Van Dyk, 1997). However, Ellstrom and Kock (2009) note that a logical conclusion would be that a positive evaluation of, for instance, an education or its effects on the participants does not really tell us anything about the effects on different levels. They advice that it is much easier to achieve positive effects on the first level than on the second, just as it is much more difficult to achieve effects on the third or fourth level than on the second. In general, Ellstrom and Kock (2009), caution against interpreting effects on the first level (or on any other level) as an indicator that effects also exist on a ‘higher level’. It may not be the case.

CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Literature shows that for decades now student and peer evaluation is a key concept of modern management in universities as a supervision and quality assurance mechanism tool. But from an idealistic point of view, assessment and reporting of students and peer evaluation, is intended to promote professionalism, creation of knowledge, self-management and the ethical commitment of university academic staff. Many other university systems in the world use the models but at different levels, scales and intentions. In some universities student evaluations are mandatory and are widely used for granting tenure, promotion, staff retention or appraisal. Elsewhere in the UK, Smith and Morris (2012) report that Higher Education institutions are being asked to be more accountable to students on teaching quality and to provide greater transparency in areas as the student experience. According to Smith and Morris in the UK and the worldwide, over 600 universities are expected to publish online summary reports of student surveys of lecture courses.

The approach is intended to aiding choice and stimulating competition between the best academics. However, literature suggests that the importance of student and peer evaluations, both for formative and summative purposes remain a contentious issue among lecturers. Whether lecturers sincerely value these evaluations and use the information (ratings and comments) to engage practically with student learning is a matter of choice. One of the reasons given is that student ratings do not wholly reflect actual teaching effectiveness (Smith & Morris, 2012; Spiller, 2010; Iyamu & Aduwa-Ogbaen, 2005; Shevlin et al., 2000).

At Stanford University for instance, it is reported that gathering evidence of teaching effectiveness, help departments and other academic decision-making bodies in making objective decisions about retention, promotion, tenure, and pay raises (Stanford University Newsletter, 1997). Elsewhere, at Waikato University student evaluations contribute significantly to formal appraisal process and promotion (Spiller, 2010). Regardless of what evaluations are used for, institutions continue to experience more pressure to be more accountable to students on teaching quality and to provide greater transparency in areas such as student experience (Smith & Morris, 2012). The rationale and logic for assessment and reporting procedures embedded in student and peer evaluations is rooted in professional competence development of the academic staff. Han (2009:68) argues that competence is not a “list of useful expertise” but also a keyword of many grant narratives that initiate the macro changes in education systems for the advancement of knowledge capitalism. According to Han, the competence concept contains within it a tremendous degree of practicality- it gives a much needed critical perspective to understand the grand picture of the current changes within education. While making a judgement from evidence collected and deciding whether it satisfies the competency standard is a delicate activity. However, assessments events can be used as learning in itself even if the person being assessed is competent as it can lead to discussion about the next stage of learning (Charles Darwin University [CDU], 2009). This point underlines the primary goal for undertaking this study.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Assessment and reporting of students and peer evaluations are related concepts. In Higher Education the two are usually referred to together in academic staff promotion and awarding of tenure. However, the process of gathering and interpreting information about lecturer’s skill and professional competency development as influenced by both student and lecturer (peer) evaluations is not clearly articulated in terms of competencies. Communicating information about the lecturer achievement and performance from the assessment processes (both student and peer evaluations) lack a collective systematic consensus as it is not grounded on professional competence.
appreciated by lecturers. Lecturers appear reactive to the evaluations for purposes of fulfilling tenure, promotion or otherwise. The question is: What effects can be realistically achieved through the use of student and peer evaluations on professional competence development of lecturers?

OBJECTIVE
The objective of the study was to determine utilization of student and peer evaluations information (ratings and comments) and their effects on professional competence development of lecturers.

Research Questions
1. What are the effects of both student and peer evaluations on professional competence development of lecturers?
2. At what level of the organization are the effects more pronounced?

RELATED LITERATURE
Developments in the fields of organizational psychology and modern management have witnessed the use of the word competence permeating the areas of education, working life, management and politics as a modern expression for what a person is actually able to do or achieve (Illeris, 2009). Competence is understood as the individual person’s knowledge and ability, motivation, commitment, will, learning and development potential, relations between employees and between employees and managers as well as organizational relationships (Hjort, 2009; Krag, 1997). While the concept of competence gives a multifaceted picture (Wesselink, 2010; Beckett, 2009; Gadotti, 2009; Perrotta, 2009; Irwin, 2009; Boyatzis, 1982), it could refer especially to the individual ability and readiness to meet the dynamic challenges of a job (Illeris, 2009). According to Ellstrom and Kock (2009) the focus is on the interaction between the individual and the job, and on the competence that is actually used by the individual and the job.

An operational definition for competence development as used in this study will provide a framework of understanding the interactional nature of the knowledge, skills, values, behaviours and some other aspects of human competence considered appropriate for improving teaching. Competence development refers to the teaching-learning process that can nurture an individual’s ability to work in a team, investigate, develop proposals and new ideas, relate and associate, operate in interdisciplinary, relate, analyse and evaluate situation, apply scientific and operational methodologies, search for information of interest and exchange experiences between lecturers and different departments for the purpose of broadening horizons. This definition is wholly borrowed from Gadotti (2009) and modified by removing some text to suit the context of this study. The content of this definition is, therefore, central in the development of professional competencies in education and technology teaching. While, criticism and operational challenges may be levelled against many of the definitions of competence in both theory and practice (Perrotta, 2009; Beckett, 2009; Sawchuk, 2009, Hjort, 2009), Krag’s (1997) and Hjort (2009) define competence as the individual person’s knowledge and ability, motivation, commitment, will, learning and development potential, relations between employees and between employees and managers as well as organizational relationships. This means that competence development is “the strengthening of the abilities, opportunities and motivation of employees and managers as well as the development of organizational structures in which employees and managers can use their competence” (Hjort, 2009:119).

Influenced by the works of Polanyi (1966); Rolf (1991); Wackerhausen & Wackerhausen (1993); Argyris & Schon (1996); Jarvis (1999); & Hargreaves (2000), Hjort (2009) describe professional development as an action done by individuals, teams or groups that achieve collectively a positive result through well organized structures. This means increasing work quality by engaging in (trans-) professional development activities at the work places as well as increasing legitimacy by making work and work results visible (Hjort, 2009). In this regard professional competence entails (Hjort, 2009:118) that:
- some workers are able to account for the results of their work within a discourse that is accepted as legitimate by external stakeholders,
- some workers are able to develop practical, bodily and social knowledge and work place culture that enables them to make discretionary decisions in emergent situations,
- some workers are able to function in a society because they have developed specific expertise that makes them capable of performing difficult and important tasks, and;
- others have conquered and are able to monopolize a specific monopoly of knowledge linked to a specific education.

The effects of participating in competence development at the individual level were reported by Nordhaug (1991) who, through factor analysis of various results classifies the benefits to the individual of various forms of education. To this end, Ellstrom and Kock (2009:47) outline the following effects:
- motivation for further learning (e.g. increased interest in continued education, increased interest in learning, increased interest in a certain subject),
- opportunities for career development (mainly promotion, a more interesting job, more independence), and;
- opportunities for psychosocial development (mainly increased self-confidence, self-fulfilment, new friends).

Similarly, Kock, Gill and Ellstrom (2007) in a study of competence development in small and medium-sized companies identified the following types of individual effects:
- increased skill in terms of being better able to handle the present tasks;
- increased interest in learning something new in
Conclude the discourse on professional competence development, as delineated in this article, Watkins and Cseh (2009) will have the last words. "As scholars have tried to clarify what will address organizational capacity development, it has become clear that we need more than broad patterns of competence in individuals. Organisations have core competencies that also can be defined and developed." (pp:12).

In view of the foregoing observations, student and peer evaluations, therefore, provide a source of evidence for judging professional competence of individual lecturers. As such measuring results of both student and peer evaluation must be done in line with the objectives set for the organisation’s development programme (Gerber, Nel & Van Dyk, 1997). According to Geber et al., evaluation can only be effective if it is based on clear and specified objectives which are determined beforehand and are qualified and quantified. Furthermore, evaluation must be continuous, not a once-off exercise, and must be based on uniform, objective methods and standards (Ornstein & Hunkins, 1998; Gerber et al., 1997).

METHODOLOGY
Research Design
The nature of the study called for a cross-sectional survey design, specifically targeting lecturers, Heads of Department (HOD) and senior academics drawn from the various academic departments in order to collect data at a single point in time. Gary, Mills & Airasian (2009) state that cross-sectional designs are effective for providing a snapshot of the current behaviours, attitudes, beliefs in a population. While a cross-sectional survey is not effective if the goal is to understand trends or development overtime, as it does not provide a broad enough perspective to inform decisions about changes in the process and systems reliably, it remains the best technique in providing data relatively quickly allowing the researcher to begin analysing data and draw conclusion immediately.

Instruments
An open-ended questionnaire seeking participants’ views on the use of student and peer evaluations as a tool for professional competence development of lecturers was used to collect pertinent data. The use of questionnaire was considered appropriate since the population was literate, allowing individual views and information to be collected at the same time. As such, the questionnaire was designed using operationally defined constructs (defined in terms of processes and operations that can be observed and measured) based on five levels: (strongly agree, agree, not sure, disagree and strongly disagree) and free response items in addition to open ended questions. To remove deficiencies the instrument was pilot tested using three experienced and critical lecturers and suggestions for improvement were made. Gay et al (2009), advises that having reviewers to examine the completeness of the questionnaire is one way to determine its content validity. The end product of the pilot test was a revised instrument finally distributed to the targeted research participants.

Population and Sampling
At the time of study the population for this study was made up of 106 academic staff. One of the assumed qualities in carrying out peer and student evaluations is that induction is given to lecturers at the entry point of joining the university system so that they can start on their professional activities without teething problems. As such, lecturers were regarded academically and professionally competent to carry out peer assessment evaluations, interpret and utilise student ratings and comments.

Sampling was by purposive (judgement sampling) when thirty-one lecturers were selected by the researcher for the purpose of the study. Selection was based on teaching experience and period of stay at Chinhoyi University of Technology as a lecturer. As advised by Gary et al (2009), purposive sampling requires that one provides clear criteria for selection to avoid inaccuracy in the researcher’s criteria and resulting sample selections. As such, for one to be selected, one had to be a lecturer or senior lecturer and to have served at Chinhoyi University of Technology for at least three years. The researcher used his experience and knowledge of the group to come up with the final list of participants who responded to the questionnaire.

Data Analysis
Both qualitative and quantitative data analysis were carried out. The qualitative data followed a thematic approach in its description and interpretation, allowing for triangulation of data collected from individual respondents to be interrogated. The use of a computer package, Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS) version16 was to allow for quantitative data to be analysed with easy. As such, descriptive statistics using the mean, mode and standard deviations were used to make descriptive inferences.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
Table1 show lecturers’ indication of the purpose for which evaluations are used.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>25.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotion</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>71.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenure</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>77.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pay rise</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appraisals</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>80.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For Chinhoyi University of Technology, student and peer evaluations have multipurpose. Evaluations are mostly used for academic staff appraisals (80.6%), for awarding tenure (77.4%) and promotion (71.0%). Results show that not all lecturers have the same understanding of what the evaluations are used for. Accordingly, there is little use of the evaluations when it comes to staff retention (23.8%) and pay rise (9.7%). However, the study findings show that the use of evaluations motivated lecturers to do more. Specifically, 64.5% of the lecturers were motivated by student evaluations of their teaching, while 67.7% were motivated by both student course and peer evaluations respectively. It is not clear what motivates lecturers to do more given the limited use of evaluations with respect to staff retention and pay rise.

LECTURER’S PERCEIVED BENEFITS OF STUDENT AND PEER EVALUATIONS

Student Evaluations

The benefits of student evaluations are many. Lecturers concur that the feedback loop provides an opportunity to improve on course content and depth of coverage, material selection and lecture delivery (instructional approach is enhanced). In addition this activity gives lecturers the opportunity to reflect on performance and organisation of lectures. Furthermore, lecturers indicated that student evaluations give insight on strength and weakness of their approach to teaching, commitment, attitude to work and improve quality of teaching from the perspective of students. Student evaluations help lecturers understand students and identify training needs, give feedback on areas to improve on the arrangement and progression of teaching materials. One of the response extract states: student evaluations allow the lecturer to have some ‘knowledge’ on what the student feel and think about one’s work. A point to note here is that knowledge has been traditionally regarded as theoretical, objective and an unchanging truth... (Jarvis, 2009:100). In this respect knowledge develops through experience and practice and assumes the form of wisdom through learning (Jarvis). From Jarvis we also learn that this form of knowledge does not carry equal status or significance as it does not distinguish knowledge that from knowledge how (being able to) as the two forms are learned exclusively in practice. Lecturers’ responses, however, indicated that student evaluations help in transmitting data and information as part of the curriculum of their subject matter discipline. Practice is the process of transforming knowledge that and knowledge how into being able to – itself a process of learning (Jarvis, 2009:102).

Peer evaluations

Lecturers indicated that peer evaluation is at variant with student evaluation. Where it is professionally done it gives professional and objective feedback as opposed to that of students which half the time is informed by emotions. There is value addition to teaching and learning process by continuously adding value to lecture delivery, appraisal and shared experiences. The following response extracts point to the benefits of peer evaluation from the lecturers’ perspective.

Respondent 25: To assess how knowledgeable the lecturer is and whether he/she is fit for purpose.

Respondent 30: You get professional feedback on how you deliver instruction.

Respondent 24: Useful for teaching development, promotion and quality assurance.

Respondent 14: Strengths and weaknesses from peer evaluations help in professional growth as suggestions point on areas that need improvement.

Lecturer’s responses highlight a process of competence development in which the transformation of the person through learning is influenced through peer evaluations. This process requires the individual to reach a state he/she begins to realize just how much more there is to learn. According to Jarvis (2009), the beginning of wisdom is the realization of ignorance. The lecturers thus acquire the necessary expertise to fit into the social situation and begin to take their situation and practice for granted. Thus, becoming an expert is when they continue to create their own disjuncture in the practice situation in order to enhance their expertise that of merely “fitting in” (Jarvis, 2009:107). However, the following two response extracts raise questions on the credibility and utility value of peer evaluations.

Respondent 21: Some do it for documentation purposes. No discussion on these, its documentation for its sake.

Respondent 11: Not clear so far

However, lecturers indicated that inter department peer assessments promote departmental cross breeding as it offers a platform for schools to share experiences. In addition it helps in standardizing teaching for quality improvement, reduces bias and encourages bench marking. It adds on quality assurance to ensure that we have the right people for the job.

LECTURERS’ UTILIZATION OF STUDENT RATINGS, COMMENTS AND PEER EVALUATIONS

Where comments have been drawn to the attention of the lecturers, these have been used to improve on weak areas, course presentation, developing content and in selecting appropriate teaching methods. But from a theoretical perspective lecturers indicated that student were not well informed about the purpose of evaluations. Lecturers further indicated that there is need to critically analyse student comments and ratings and improve on weak points. While student evaluations can point out areas of weakness for the lecturer, they are said to be too subjective. Specifically lecturers indicated that:

• Students normally do not take these evaluations seriously. In most cases they do not give their honest evaluations.

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• Students are not clear of what to write. They equate evaluation with assessment
• Students do not like lecturers who are principled or give them a lot of challenging work
• Students evaluations are done late in the course, as such corrective action are done when the course is next on offer. This did not benefit the student directly.
• Some aspects of the form are not relevant to course evaluation
• Student evaluation is more summative in nature
• Some students are not mature to give sound responses. They do not understand what to right.
Lecturer’s failure to utilise student comments is twofold. The lecturer chose to ignore the comments for one or more of the reasons above or that the HOD has not played his / her professional role of facilitating such feedback from the students as part of staff development initiative. The following response extracts suggest that not all student evaluations are being formally communicated to the concerned lecturers by their HODs or those responsible for carrying out the surveys.
Respondent 5: ..., where I have seen them, help me to know what helps the students and what they are not comfortable with in my lecture.
Respondent 11: No feedback has so far been communicated, nothing has been done.
Respondent 16: Yes. Some comments from students were included in the teaching of the other groups of students.
Respondent 18: Not to a large extent. Often get to see the actual evaluations / ratings summary when processing paper for appraisal.
Were feedback has been given to the lecturer and professional discussion entered into, and concrete action taken, results have been positive. A response extract from one of the HODs reads: “We had discussions with lecturers on issues raised by students in their evaluations. Some have changed their attitude towards students and a number of new concepts have been introduced following reviews”.
With regards to peer evaluations lecturers indicated that these provided a platform to share on a variety of instructional materials, content issues and delivery techniques. The major weakness is the difficulty to separate personal relationships and feelings of peers as judgements are based on personalities rather than honest professional assessment. However, lecturers conceded that corrective measures can be taken.
Lecturers further indicated that the impact of evaluations (student and peer) in professional competence development is more visible at the individual level than at the department level or school level. At the individual level, lecturers have been able to revise and update lecture material to suit current trends and technological changes, improve quality of instruction through employing innovative and creative approaches to their work. At the level of department, the benefits of these evaluations are not much although in turn lecturers take teaching seriously (quality of teaching and degree programmes improve).

In Table 2 below, the computed mean, mode and standard deviation are used to describe the extent to which lecturers agreed or disagreed to statements concerning the implementation of student and peer evaluations at Chinhoyi University of Technology. A collapsed scale indicating agreement, neutral and disagreement was designed to enable easy interpretation of scores as follows: Agree = 1 and 2; Neutral = 3; and Disagree = 4 and 5. To this end, computed mean ratings of an item below 2.5 indicates agreement, a score between 2.5 and 3.4 indicates not sure (neutral) and above 3.4 indicates disagreement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>HODs are not sure on how to deal with student evaluations for the purpose of assisting colleagues in department</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.465</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>There is lack of sincerity in the manner evaluations are being handled</td>
<td>2.26</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.437</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Both student and peer evaluations are based on clear and specified objectives</td>
<td>3.07</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.363</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Publishing online summary reports of student evaluations of lecture course will stimulate competition between academics</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Lecturer’s approach to peer evaluation is reactive in response to tenure or promotion</td>
<td>2.26</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Student evaluations are best for formative purposes</td>
<td>2.17</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.848</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Peer evaluations must not be based on lecturer’s choice of the assessor</td>
<td>2.19</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.327</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>The value of course evaluations is clear to the students</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.349</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Students express their views on course improvement at a time the feedback does not benefit them directly</td>
<td>2.11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.286</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Appropriate feedback on students ratings and comments is formally communicated by HODs</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.520</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The descriptive analysis shows that both student and peer evaluations processes needs to improve if this important educational exercise is to realise positive incremental results to the satisfaction of students. An HOD has to be wary of and be someone knowledgeable in handling student and peer evaluations feedback issues. As such, evaluation objectives must be clear to both student and lecturer.
Lecturers were not sure (neutral) about whether publishing student evaluation summaries could stimulate competition among colleagues. However, they agreed with a mean of 2.11 (agreeing), a mode of 1 (strongly agreeing) and a standard deviation of 1.286 (almost close) to the statement that students express their views on course improvement at a time the feedback did not benefit the concerned group of learners. Another important observation made is that feedback on student evaluation ratings and comments was largely not being communicated formally to respective lecturers to effect the changes that may bring desired outcomes.

**HOW CAN STUDENT FEEDBACK MAKE A DIFFERENCE?**

One of the pertinent questions raised in this study was to find out from the lecturers how the university can prove to students that their feedback is making a difference. The following points were presented as possible strategies.

- Providing evidence that their input is used in programme development.
- Improving the quality of teaching and undertake routine appraisals and feedback.
- Holding awareness on the importance of evaluations and inform students about the purpose.
- Awarding distinguished teacher award yearly.
- Discuss with students the summary of evaluations and what action was taken.
- Allowing lecturers to go through the evaluation forms and talk to students afterwards.
- Carry out evaluation surveys in time to allow adjustments where necessary during the course of the semester or module.
- Compile statistics for individual courses and lecturers, monitor and evaluate change in teaching and addressing identified weaknesses.
- University should work towards effective instructional delivery by providing adequate resources for teaching and learning.

**CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS**

Findings of the study led to the identification of five principal areas of professional competences demonstrated through student and peer evaluation. Theoretically student and peer evaluation provide lecturers with an opportunity to demonstrate the extent to which they have synthesized prior knowledge into a substantive conceptual, methodological and analytical awareness that enables them to successfully function and contribute to scholarship within their academic discipline. From Barnes & Lock (2010), this development demonstrates changes in terms of knowledge, skills, values, behaviours or some human competence appropriate for quality improvement in teaching. What becomes clear from this discourse is that lecturers gain:

- General knowledge - broad familiarity with understanding of pertinent social, scientific and educational issues and aspects related to course design and delivery of prepared learning material.
- In-Depth knowledge - thorough and detailed knowledge of a range of issues in their specific subject discipline
- Pedagogical knowledge and competencies - pedagogical competence and critical analysis of current instructional approaches and techniques such as the use of digital materials and e-learning portals.
- Professional and collegial competencies - a range of professional competencies that enhance active professional engagement, and;
- Teaching and instructional competencies - a range of teaching competencies demonstrative of readiness, preparedness and awareness to assume the role of teacher and mentor in academia and educational contexts.

These competencies are more pronounced at the individual level than at any other level of the organization. The actions by individual lecturers achieve collectively a positive result for the organisation. However, the actions could be more effective if lecturers were engaged in inter-professional development initiative by making their work visible at department and school level. Borrowing from Ellstrom and Kock (2009), we note lecturers show some degree of motivation for further learning (increased interest in utilisation of student and peer comments, increased self-confidence and self-fulfilment among lecturers. There is also increased skill in terms of being better able to handle the present tasks, a better overall view of the job and increased interest in learning (Kock et al., 2007). But the individual person’s knowledge and ability, motivation, commitment, will, learning and development potential (Krac, 1997; Hjort, 2009; Illeris, 2009), may be compromised due to weak interdepartmental collaborative efforts between academic staff, between chairperson, deans as well as organic relations in matters to do with student and peer evaluations.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following recommendations were based on general comments given by lecturers. The major highlights were that the evaluation objectives should be clear to both students and staff. They also pointed out that there is need for constant review of the evaluation forms to make sure they measure the intended objectives by re-aligning these with current world trends. The process also needs to be open with feedback given at the earliest possible time to both students and lecturer. Resources should also be made available to raise the standards of teaching.
and learning. Evaluations must be administered early enough to allow for improvements that will benefit the concerned group(s) of students.

REFERENCES


