Assessment of existing teaching evaluation process in a higher education institution of Bangladesh

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Abstract: This paper surveys recent literature on the topic of student evaluations of teaching (SETs) to highlight the importance of SETs and the different factors that affect the SET scores. The paper conducts a cursory survey among the students of a private university of Bangladesh to find out what students think about the existing teaching evaluation process of the university and the instrument used for the evaluation. The survey results illustrate the view of the students on different issues related to SETs. In the end we added some recommendations on the basis of the survey finding that might help institutes develop effective SET tools and processes.

Keywords: Student evaluations of teaching (SETs); quality teaching; faculty evaluation; effective teacher.

1. Introduction:

Student evaluations of teaching (SETs) is one of the most common ways in determining the teaching effectiveness of a teacher. In Bangladesh, the teaching evaluation process is mostly practiced in the private universities and the most common form of teaching evaluation is evaluation by students through a survey questionnaire. The survey questionnaire is generally comprised of questions about educational objectives and activities of the teacher. Significant research has been conducted to find out the reliability and validity of the instruments for student evaluation because student evaluation can be highly affected by students' potential biasness in rating and gender, students' perceptions of evaluations, their motivation to

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participate and a number of other related issues [Kelly(2012), Berk (2005)]. However, despite all these highly influential factors, there is still a very common question among the academics whether undergraduate students have the ability to assess instructor's teaching competence and effectiveness [Clayson & Sheffet (2006), Cashin (1999)].

Besides all these logical reasoning and evaluations, it remains true that student evaluation is one of the main tools for assessing the instructors teaching capability and competence that are vital for their professional growth and tenure [Kelly (2012)].

The concept of SETs in private universities of Bangladesh became popular in early 1993 when the Government of Bangladesh permitted establishment of private universities with an act in the parliament in 1992. In the following few years some new private universities were established and they introduced the paper based teaching evaluation system. Very recently some of those private universities have introduced online based SETs. In this online process students are to log in using their student ID numbers and they respond to some multiple choice questions or yes/no questions and a few open ended questions seeking their suggestions.

In this paper we briefly discuss the purpose of SETs, the different measurement tools used worldwide as instruments of student evaluation and the factors that influence SETs. This paper also depicts some survey results on student's perception of SETs and their opinions to improve the evaluation system present in a reputed private university of Bangladesh. We also include some recommendations at the end of the paper.

2. Purpose of SETs:

The concept of SETs was well introduced worldwide in the early 1970s and the intended primary objective of SETs was formative, that is, to improve and shape the quality of teaching. However, since the 1970s, SETs have also been used as a tool of summative evaluation of a teacher's performance to decide about promotion, and tenure [Berk (2005)].

Now a days, student evaluations of teaching effectiveness are practiced at many universities and higher education institutions throughout the world, and many researchers have analyzed the formation and effectiveness of SETs from different perspectives and orientations. There is a well-developed literature addressing the construction of the student evaluations of teaching effectiveness. The basic purpose of SETs has the following three aspects [Kelly (2012)]:

- SETs are used to create a formative (or developmental) perspective among students. Evaluations are used to provide feedback to faculty in order to help them to improve their teaching methods, teaching tools and course content.

- SETs are used as a tool to evaluate the learning environment of a class. SETs are also used as a way to measure student engagement in the teaching-learning process.
- SET outcomes can also serve summative (or administrative) purposes. They are used in tenure, merit and promotion decisions of a faculty.

The overall success of SETs depend on student perceptions and their willingness to participate in the evaluation process. To a faculty, the main use of SET results lies in the successful classroom management, and developing efficient teaching tools and methods to meet the course learning outcomes (CLOs). Fundamentally, faculty is concerned with the use of SETs for summative purposes because the SET score is often used as an important criterion for their promotion and tenure [Berk (2005), Davidovitch & Soen (2011)].

3. Measurement Instruments of SETs:

In the last several years most of the private universities, especially the first 10 top ranked [Shegufta (2019)], of Bangladesh have used paper based offline survey of students of a particular class for SETs. The students are asked to rate their instructors on a Likert scale for a number of statements (questions) concerning the overall teaching quality of the instructor and the teaching-learning environment in the classroom. These data are collected and a numerical value is assigned against each scale factor used in the Likert scale [Agresti & Finlay (1997)].

In all the top ranked private universities in Bangladesh a common practice is to follow the assessment Likert scale tool used in reputed North American universities, and the assessment scale to assess teaching competencies are: "poor", "satisfactory", "good", "very good", and "Excellent". These categories are specified with a numerical value from 1 to 5. That means numeric value 1 is assigned for category "poor", value 2 is assigned for category "satisfactory", value 3 is assigned for category "good", value 4 is assigned for category "very good", and value 5 is assigned for category "Excellent". The average of all the numerical values of different statements (questions) gives the overall numeric value achieved by an instructor on a particular course. Finally this average value is multiplied by a factor of 20 to give a scale on 100.

Our observation finds that very recently few of those top ranked private universities have introduced online based SETs. In this online based assessment, students login to a designated online portal of the university using their student ID and complete/assess all the statements (questions) online. This is just a prototype of all the paper based previous work, but, since everything is online, students do not need to complete the assessment in the class, in other words, in front of the instructor. As a result there is less possibility to be biased to/threatened by the assessment. However, both the assessment tools (paper based and online) remain under the question that the categories differ the quality mainly, and the interval in quantitative interpretation of these quality is not well defined [Hornstein (2017)]. Another critical observation is the statistical evaluation of categorical data. For any

statistical evaluation (like the SETs) one should not include measures of central tendency like means or averages because they are appropriate only for quantitative data. An average calculated on categorical data is quite meaningless and misleading [Stark & Freishtat (2014)]. For example, average of marks in a class can be a meaningful data for a particular course, whereas the average mark from different courses taken by a particular student does not reflect whether the student is good at Mathematics or not. It is not logical to take average of different heterogeneous categories, and it is impossible to interpret average scores of categories. So, the concern is in the legitimacy of the SET score used in most of the universities in decision-making around tenure, promotion and hiring.

4. Factors that Influence SETs:

There is a well-developed research addressing the factors that influence SETs. Some of the crucial factors opened up in many researches are the students' willingness and their motivation to participate, potential biasness in rating, faculty's gender issue, grading criteria and strictness of faculty, and student perceptions of evaluations [Uttl et al. (2017), Griffin (2004)].

In many institutions, it is not mandatory for students to fill out SET forms, and there is no incentive for them to fill out teaching evaluation forms. As a result students do not show any interest in participating SETs. Students may not respond because they feel that their opinions are not counted and valued. Although research says that student perceptions on SETs are very positive and they feel that their responses to SETs reflect an accurate measure of the teaching effectiveness of a particular faculty, the authority does not care about their evaluation and as a result same faculty remains in the same course semester after semester although his/her student evaluation was poor [Beecham (2009)].

Research shows that students typically like an instructor who is warm, friendly, extrovert and enthusiastic [Clayson & Sheffet (2006)]. Such an instructor can very easily reach to the heart of the students and can assess the level of understanding of each student. Students can ask questions and place their feedback in the class, and the instructor values all these feedbacks in a positive manner.

A much related issue that influences SETs is the students' feeling of quality teaching. If the students feel that their evaluations are not used to improve teaching performance or provide feedback on teaching effectiveness, they are less likely to participate the SETs. As a consequence, upper-year student participation rates in SETs are very low, and such participation rates in first-year classes are tend to be higher [Chen & Hoshower (2003)].

Research shows there are many external factors that influence the SET scores, such as the length of the course, the age and gender of the instructor, and many other factors that are directly not correlated to effective teaching and learning. In some cases the gender biasness can be large enough to dominate over all the other efficient traits of an effective instructor and make the SET score less compared to that of a less effective instructor [Boring et al (2016)].

Another important factor that received much attention in literature is the relationship of SET score and the grades. Some research has found that instructors sometimes can be very lenient in grading, develop easy assessment, and exert low effort to get good SET scores [Braga et al. (2014), Marsh & Roche (2000), Griffin (2004)]. But there are other research which says that actually these factors have very less effect on SET scores [Uttl et al. (2017)]. Very effective teaching, cooperative and interactive classroom environment and a regular feedback practice in the classroom can always reduce such conjecture and help students improve their academic performance at the end of a semester.

There are many other factors that directly influence the SET scores, for example, instructors entertaining students (class party, semester end party, special day celebration etc.) get higher SET scores [Griffin (2004)]. The instructor's expressiveness to deliver lectures sometime makes a huge change to get high SET score, although lecture content is not well developed and well organized [Cashin (1999)].

5. Survey Findings:

In order to understand how the students view the current system of faculty evaluation by the students, we conducted a short survey on 164 students belonging to different departments of a very reputed private university of Bangladesh. The students were asked 10 yes/no questions and one open ended question seeking suggestions regarding alternative ways of faculty evaluation.

The summary of the results of the questionnaire is given in Chart-1. A vast majority of the students surveyed (94%) are aware of the faculty evaluation done every semester. They are mostly satisfied with the ease with which they fill in the forms (93%) and the instructions given to fill up the forms (79%). They also prefer the current online system of evaluation (84%).

However, despite the awareness, ease and comfort related to faculty evaluation, 21% of the students surveyed refrained from participating the evaluation last semester (Fall 2018). When asked why, they mentioned three reasons: student response does not count (11%), participating in the evaluation is not mandatory (9%) and faculty evaluation is not important (1%).

Moreover, though the students prefer the online system of evaluation, they show some reservation towards the system (33%) mainly due to identity disclosure issue. According to the comments made by the students in order to support their negative response, they think paper-based system is more secured in hiding the identity of the students, whereas the online system does not guarantee that. They are apprehensive about negative consequences of speaking the truth in the evaluation form.
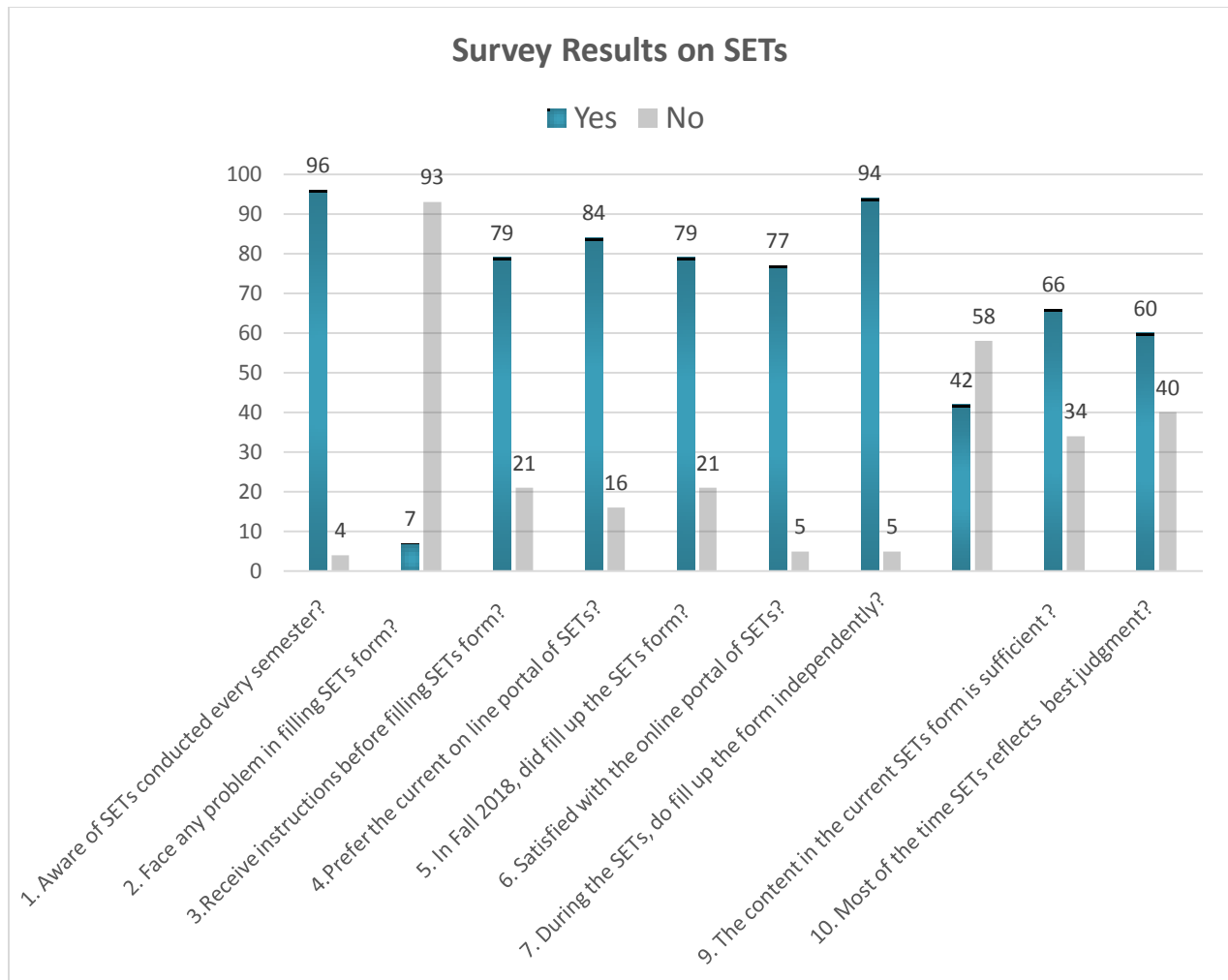
Survey Results on SETs

Chart 1: Survey results on teaching evaluation system by students

Though the students are routinely doing the faculty evaluation exercise every semester, they think the evaluation system is unable to reflect the best judgment of the students (40%) and content of the evaluation form is inadequate to evaluate faculty (34%).

6. Recommendations:

Based on the literature survey and the survey results, we recommend the following for the online based SETs present in some top ranked private universities of Bangladesh:

1. **Continue online based SETs:** Continue with the current online evaluation system with a mechanism for repeated reminders (online/ face-to-face) throughout the semester to fill-in the evaluation form.

2. **Make SETs mandatory**:   Establish the system of blocking the course registration/advising if evaluation is not done by a student in order to develop the sense that faculty evaluation is mandatory.
3. **Reserve student confidentiality:** Assure the students that their identity will never be at stake. Ensure that there are no negative consequences on a student for rightly expressing him/herself.
4. **Encourage students to SETs**: Assure the students that their response do matter by taking visible actions to help faculty improve professionally based on student feedback.
5. **Review SET form periodically:** Assign a committee to review the current evaluation form to see if the content can be revised in order to better reflect student judgment. The committee may take into consideration some supplementary methods of faculty evaluation as suggested by the students in the survey.

7. Conclusion:

Definitely the SETs have some positive impacts on effective and quality teaching, but at the same time there remain questions whether the SET scores reflect the best evaluation of someone's teaching performance. Our findings and the above literature suggest that SETs should be carefully designed and contents should be very specific and measurable towards implementing this as an effective tool for faculty development, promotion and tenure. University should develop a mechanism which will motivate students to participate in the evaluation process and reflect their best judgments on SET forms. The issue of faculty evaluation makes sense to a teacher, to a student, and to an institution when it leads to improvement in teaching. Therefore, there should be enough opportunities/provisions present in the institute, such as faculty development programs, research and pedagogy related seminars, and teaching-learning workshops which will help faculty to improve their teaching effectiveness and as a whole become 'a complete teacher'. Students will also feel motivated by observing visible changes based on their evaluation of the teachers.

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