Students' Perception of Online Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET) in Nigeria

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Abstract—**Evaluations of teaching effectiveness are considered critical elements in teaching and learning processes in higher institutions. They allow students to complete course evaluations as part of the institution-wide assessment process. This paper examines students' perception of teaching evaluation system in the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. In this study, a questionnaire was administered to some undergraduate students from the Mathematics Department. A total of 99 students filled the web-based questionnaire. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data collected through the activation of the SPSS and Microsoft Excel application software. The results showed that the students have positive perception to teaching evaluation. They were optimistic that the result of their evaluation would be taken seriously for further evaluation and capacity building of their lecturers. The results also indicated that the students were more comfortable filling the evaluation at the end of class session rather than at the beginning. Thus, it could be submitted that the evaluation platform has contributed more significantly in determining the students' perception of the teaching evaluation in the university. In general, the students in this study agreed that the teaching evaluation system will improve teaching and learning activities of both the lecturers and the students respectively.**

Keywords-student evaluation of teaching (SET); students' perception; higher education

I. INTRODUCTION

Teaching is increasingly more important to the research goals of higher education [1]. In addition to research, teaching constitutes an integral part of higher education, hence, the need to have an effective delivery system enhanced through responsive evaluation mechanisms. Teaching Evaluations are conducted in order to improve the overall teaching effectiveness. In higher education, students evaluations of teaching (SET) is the most commonly employed method of assessing teaching effectiveness, as it is the currently successful online platform and out-of-class setting teaching evaluation mechanism [2]. The results of these evaluations usually serve as important feedback to various stakeholders along the educational value chain which includes: students, teachers, departments, faculty, university administrators, government policy makers and researchers. There is increase in number of literatures with respect to students' assessment of teachings in tertiary institution and largely the importance of course evaluation as medium of communicating the difference in the strengths and the weaknesses of the teaching method against that of instructional [1]. Despite the existence of alternative methods of teaching evaluation, SET remains the most widely used and popular [2].

In this regards, validity of the survey instrument has taken the most focused on SET related studies. Nevertheless, several studies [3][4][5][6][7][8][9] have investigated students and faculty members general perceptions on the process of SET. On the studies examining student perception, a number of findings and conclusions were reached. This ranged from students understanding of the importance of SET in improving teaching [10][2] to students been pessimistic about whether their comments would be taken seriously [9]. In relation to how SET is been administered, students mostly have more preference for online than the paper-based SET surveys for reasons of convenience, anonymity, privacy, and availability of time to reason and think about their responses [5][11].

Even though the earlier cited studies exist with their respective findings, this current study intends to conduct a similar study in a different context in terms of environment and other infrastructural and administrative system peculiarities. A number of factors can influence results of studies of this nature. Recently, that is, 2014, the Ahmadu Bello University has moved from the paper-based to computerized online teaching evaluation system. For the paper-based evaluation, copies of questionnaire are distributed to students before the commencement of examination right inside examination hall. This method has its associated challenges and shortcomings such as anxiety, lack of privacy, phobia arising from the controlled environment and so on. Meanwhile, the current computer-based teaching evaluation provides the students with the flexibility of time for response and environment.

Therefore, the main purpose of this study is to examine the students' perception of online SET. Hence, the students' perception is expected to provide an overview of themselves, their lecturers, the evaluation process and the evaluation

platform. Thus, the paper will add to the growing body of literature on students' perception on teaching evaluation in Nigeria. The study took place at department of Mathematics Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Lecturer evaluation is a periodic exercise of measuring lecturers' performance by students [17]. It is a systematic collection and analysis of information from which certain decisions related to effectiveness, efficiency and/or competence of a lecturer in realising set professional goals are made. In addition, Cross [18] mentioned that "lecturers' anxiety about students' evaluations seems alleviated if lecturers are convinced that the evaluation results are meant to help them assess their own teaching and identify areas to improve".

Among the early studies of teaching evaluation in Nigeria is the work of Watkins & Akande [19]. They reported an investigation which tested the applicability of two American instruments (the Students' Evaluation of Educational Quality and the Endeavor Instruments) designed to assess tertiary students' evaluations of teaching effectiveness with 158 Nigerian undergraduates. This research findings indicated that teaching effectiveness can be measured in a Nigerian setting, that evaluation instruments developed at American universities may well be reliable in Nigeria.

Blair & Inniss [20] conducted a pilot study to determine whether an online student evaluation questionnaire (SEQ) offered a pragmatic alternative to the hard copy version and whether the students in this developing nation (Trinidad and Tobago) were ready for the change to the online modality. The pilot study was analyzed against three success indicators: 1) that the average student response rate should be maintained. 2) That the turn-around-time should be improved. 3) That student satisfaction should be increased. However, specific limitations were also acknowledged as this pilot study was specific to one case, and therefore, not easily generalizable. Furthermore, the research also suggested that results from the pilot study expressed positive student perception of online SEQ as they were likely to use online SEQs just as they would with their hard copy equivalents, and that future students were more likely to favour the online format.

A study [2] investigated motivators and barriers to student and faculty engagement with an online SET process. This was done by conducting semi-structured interviews with selected students, who self-identified as either "completers" or "non-completers" of SET, and 12 faculty members. Results from the study showed students motivation to complete SET were backed by students' perception that results would be used and/or considered by instructors. On the other hand, students' barriers to complete SET were backed by timing and number of surveys presented to the students. Results also showed that faculty members were motivated to engage with SET when the response rates were high and when senior administrators acknowledged survey results. This investigation of motivators and barriers to engagement with online SET was subjected to certain limitations. First, this study drew from a small number of students and faculty members within a single institution. Second, all participants were self-selected and not randomly picked, thus may have had a particular interest in the topic.

Abedin, *et al.* [21] attempted to investigate lecturers' and students' perceptions of Student Feedback Online (SuFO) in four aspects: 1) Lecturers' and students' perceptions on students' evaluation. 2) The significance of SuFO evaluation to lecturers and students. 3) The differences between lecturers' and students' perceptions on the SuFO evaluation process. 4) Students' response to their evaluation. The study was conducted using questionnaire given out to 97 lecturers and 330 second-semester students selected from various programmes in UiTM Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia. Findings expressed that there were no significant differences between students' and lecturers' perceptions on course evaluation process.

There were other studies that have investigated students' perception of SET in selected schools, subject areas and evaluation modalities (paper-pencil/online). However, paper-pencil is most common in Nigeria and this has posed serious challenges to the use of SET especially in Ahmadu University, Zaria. One outstanding challenge is the negative perception of students about the integrity and effectiveness of the system. Nevertheless, the focus of the current study is to examine students' perception of new computer-based SET in operation in the university.

III. METHODS

The purpose of this study is to explore students' perception of teaching evaluation system. To achieve this, a quantitative empirical research method was adopted. This section discussed the instrument used for data collection.

The structured questionnaire was used to collect data from the respondents in this study. The Faculty and Course Evaluation Questionnaire (FCEQ) by Heine and Maddox [12] was adopted with slight modifications.

This study targets responses from students of the Mathematics Department in Faculty of Science, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria. These students mainly comprises of 2nd to 4th (final) year students. These set of students were chosen because of their relative/reasonable experience with the teaching evaluation system of the University. Even though random selection would have been preferred, this was not employed because of the large number of students in the department. In order to reach out as many as possible respondents, the participation was voluntary with instructions that participating students should help reach out to their colleagues through mobile phone, e-mail and other communication channels. The purpose of this was to attract many students through peer group broadcasting. Consequently a web-based (google form) questionnaire was posted on the authors' websites. The questionnaire was divided into two parts A and B.

Demographic questions were captured in Part A with the background information of the respondents which include:
- Age distribution
- Gender
- Level of study

While, the Part B was made up of four sections that address: 1) Students responses about themselves; 2) Students responses about lecturers; 3) Students responses about

Evaluation Process; 4) Students responses about the Evaluation platform used. For all the items in Part B, the Likert scale 1 to 5 response options were used.

IV. RESULTS

From the survey, 99 responses were collected. Basic quantitative data analysis was done using the SPSS and the Microsoft Excel application software. The sample size for this study adopted the recommendation by Tabachnick and Fidell [13] who stated that the sample size (N) should be greater than $50 + 8m$ (where m is number of independent variables). In this study, the independent variables were 3 (i.e. Platform, Students and Lecturers). Therefore, $50 + 8(3) = 74$; this made the sample size (99) adequate for this study.

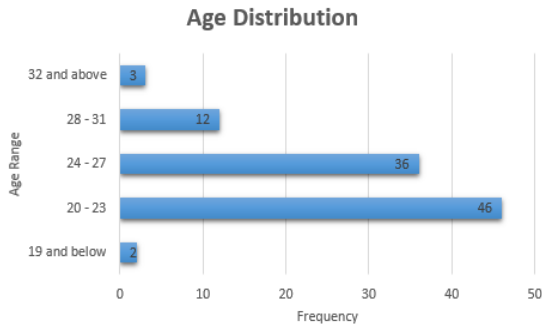The results of the findings are presented as follows:

Figure 1. Age distribution of respondents

A. Demographic Information

Most of the students (46%) were within the age bracket of 20 - 23 years as presented in Figure 1. This age bracket represented the average age of the undergraduate students in the department as at the time of the study. On the other hand, most of the respondents were 400 level students which constituted 51% of the total respondents. Figure 2 shows the Class level distribution of the respondents. Majority of the respondents were male students which accounted for 81% of the responses while 19% were female students.
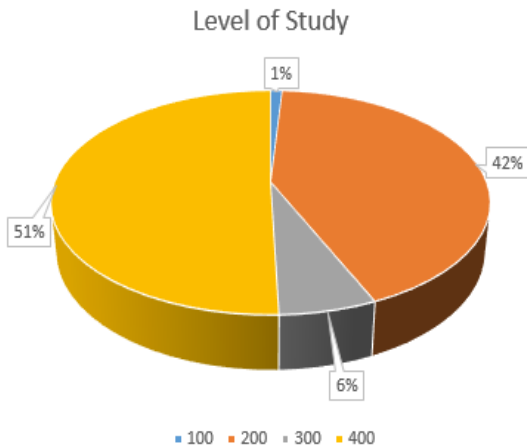

Figure 2. Level of study of the respondents

B. Students' Perception on Teaching Evaluation

In this section, the results of responses gathered on students' perception of teaching evaluation were presented. Data collected were re-coded and analyzed in terms of mean and standard deviations.

1) Students Responses about Themselves

This section presents results on students' responses about themselves (see Table I). The results shows the mean and standard deviation (SD) of the responses.

TABLE I.   STUDENTS RESPONSES ABOUT THEMSELVES

Item	Question	Mean	SD
1	I take evaluating the lecturers in my courses seriously.	3.71	1.163
2	I feel comfortable giving a negative evaluation for a bad lecturer.	3.32	1.413
3	I rate lecturers based on their personality and enthusiasm and not on what I have learned.	2.80	1.421
4	The higher the grade that I expect to receive in a class, the more positive my evaluation.	3.07	1.380
5	I don't write negative comments on the evaluation form for fear of being identified.	2.71	1.566
6	Overall, I think the lecturer and course evaluation process is important.	4.28	1.011

2) Students Responses about Lecturers

Table II shows the mean and standard deviation of students' responses about their lecturers.

TABLE II.   STUDENTS RESPONSES ABOUT LECTURES

Item	Question	Mean	SD
1	Lecturers take my evaluation comments seriously.	3.26	1.200
2	My evaluations are used in lecturer tenure and salary raise decisions.	2.53	1.190
3	Lecturers use their evaluations to improve their courses.	3.77	1.159
4	When students give low evaluations, lecturers adjust to improve their teaching.	3.57	1.239
5	Lecturers adjust their behavior at the end of the semester to get better evaluations.	3.24	1.294

3) Students Response about the Evaluation

The result of responses of students about the evaluation process is presented on Table III.

TABLE III.   STUDENTS RESPONSES ABOUT EVALUATION PROCESS

Item	Question	Mean	SD
1	Completing the evaluation form in the beginning of a class is better than later in the class.	2.49	1.487
2	The questions asked on the form are clear to me.	4.02	1.069
3	The questions asked on the form are relevant to evaluating a course/lecturer.	3.91	1.070
4	Overall, I think the lecturer and course evaluation process is effective	3.73	1.150

4) Students Response about the Platform

Table IV presents results of students' responses about the evaluation platform.

TABLE IV. STUDENTS RESPONSES ABOUT EVALUATION PLATFORM

Item	Question	Mean	SD
1	Learning to operate the system was easy for me	3.98	1.097
2	My interaction with the system was clear and understandable	4.08	1.075
3	I find the system flexible to interact with	4.02	1.097
4	It would be easy for me to become skillful at using the system	3.96	1.059
5	I would find the system easy to use	3.91	1.089

Linear regression was used to determine the effect of the independent variables on the dependent variable (Perception).

The significance (Sig.) on Table V determines if the independent variables make a significant unique contribution to the prediction of the dependent variable. Using 0.05 significant level (p), it was observed that Platform (p=0.000) and Students (p=0.039) had a significant unique contribution, while Lecturers (p=0.996) had non-significant contribution toward prediction of the dependent variable.

TABLE V. LINEAR REGRESSION

Variable	B	Beta	t	Sig.
Students	0.167	0.182	2.094	0.039
Lecturers	0.000	0.000	-0.005	0.996
Platform	0.444	0.575	6.291	0.000
F= 26.987			R^2= 0.460	

The three independent variables explained 46% of the variance in students' perception about evaluation process.

V. DISCUSION

From the findings above, note that the responses were mostly from 200 and 400 level students. The reason was that the 100 level students are usually more of faculty students as they have more general faculty courses to offer than departmental course work. Meanwhile, the 300 level students were on industrial training mostly outside the university at the time of this study.

Responses about students themselves revealed that students usually take evaluating lecturers in their courses seriously and were comfortable giving negative evaluation about "bad" lecturers. For the negative comments on the evaluation form, the results showed that students were skeptical about making such comments for the fear of identification. As in [12] findings from this study also revealed that the students were not too keen about the personality of the lecturers when rating them. However, they were overwhelmingly convinced that the process is important for the advancement of university education. This finding also agrees with the findings of [12][15].

Students responses about lecturers showed that the students were confident that their lecturers took evaluation comments seriously but they were not sure whether their evaluation would be used in lecturer service tenure (e.g. full or part-time basis), and salary increment. Further, the students were optimistic that their evaluation (especially the low evaluations) will prompt lecturers to improve on the course content and teaching generally. Previous studies like [2][15] also reported that students were confident that their evaluations would be taken seriously by the school administrators. Even though [12] reported that students remained neutral on whether their evaluation comment would prompt lecturers to improve on general teaching and learning process.

Responses about the evaluation process suggested that students preferred completing the evaluation form at the end of the class session rather than at the beginning. The students considered the questions on the form appropriate and clear enough for their understanding, and relevant for the evaluation of the courses/lecturers. Overall, they were confident that the evaluation was more effective considering the fact that it was done online. Hence, some students believed the online based evaluation would be easier and more realistic to manage their comments compare to the paper-based SET. This is in accordance with the findings of [16][20] that students were comfortable with the online evaluation because of its convenience and ability to make the respondents anonymous.

Students' responses about the evaluation platform revealed the platform was easy to learn, to operate and to interact with. They also claimed the system was clear and understandable. Further, the system, they stated was flexible.

Conclusively, in determining students' perception of teaching evaluation system, the platform contributed more significantly compared to the students and lecturers as independent variables in the study.

VI. LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

Questionnaire was used as the only data collection instrument; generally, questionnaire is as a data collection tool is streamlined to predefined items. Also, the scope of the study was within the Department of Mathematics with a sample size of 99 respondents. Increasing the sample size and widening the case study would increase the gamut of the generalization of the findings from the study.

VII. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

This study explored students' perception of teaching evaluation system in Nigerian University. The result revealed that students were usually motivated to fill the online teaching evaluation form which they considered a very important exercise. However, they were skeptical if their comments as registered on the form would be taken seriously for the improvement and advancement of teaching and learning in the department. The study also showed that the students preferred that the teaching evaluation be done at the beginning of the semester rather than the later part of the semester. On the evaluation platform, the students found it easy to use, they also understood the content which they claimed was flexible to interact with.

To be succinct, it could be concluded that for student evaluation of teaching to have a meaningful role in the operation of Nigerian universities and other higher institution of learning, it is important that these institutions focus on

students' expectation and perception with regards to the role of teaching evaluation using the emerging Information Communication Technology and the New Media especially the online system.

On the future direction of this study, this study is expected to be extended to other departments, universities etc., with more number of respondents to enable it come up with a more generalizable results. In addition, it is intended here that a comparative study on students' perception of teaching evaluation in different faculties of the Ahmadu Bello University is conducted.

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