

STUDENT RATINGS OF TEACHING: WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN VIETNAMESE AND TAIWANESE FACULTIES' PERSPECTIVES?

Yang, Chen-Sheng¹; Nguyen, Thi Hao^{1,2*}; Jiang, Yi Sheng¹

¹College of Education, National Chi Nan University
1 University Road, Puli, Nantou, Taiwan 545, R.O.C.

²Faculty of Education
Ho Chi Minh City University of Social Sciences and Humanities
12 Dinh Tien Hoang Street, District 1, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.

* Corresponding author: haonguyenpy2@yahoo.com/ +886 970 874 957

Abstract: This paper examines how Vietnamese and Taiwanese instructors react to the use of student ratings of teaching in tertiary schools. A survey instrument and nonparametric statistic methods were used to collect and analyze data of student rating in both Vietnam and Taiwan. The analysis found that: (a) approve and support usefulness of student rating results for instructional improvement from National Chi Nan University side was stronger than these of Vietnam National University-Ho Chi Minh City side; (b) Vietnam National University-Ho Chi Minh City showed that the same instrument of student ratings can't be appropriate for all courses of different disciplines; (c) Faculty members in general tend to water down their requirements in order to get favorable ratings according to National Chi Nan University teachers' perceptions.

Keywords: Student Ratings of Teaching, Instructors' Perceptions, Vietnamese and Taiwanese Higher Education.

1. INTRODUCTION

First used in Canadian and American universities in the mid-1920s, student ratings of instruction have become integral to accountability in higher education (Zabaleta, 2007). Student rating of teaching in Vietnamese and Taiwanese university is required by both countries in order to improve instruction. This kind of evaluation is a popular approach to teacher evaluation. Students express their opinions and feelings concerning their teacher's instructional processes and activities each semester. However, student ratings are still controversial in both countries; instructors are concerned about the reliability and validity of results.

Vietnam and Taiwan are both in East Asia and are both strongly influenced by traditional Confucianism. The growth of higher education of Taiwan has valuable lessons for Vietnam. Given these concerns, this study examines differences in instructors' perceptions of student ratings in both Vietnam and Taiwan, based on empirical evidence at National Chi Nan University (NCNU) and Vietnam National University - Ho Chi Minh City (VNU-HCMC). These results provide school administrators basis for improving and assuring training quality. This study also provides a basis for the use of student ratings in personnel decision-making.

Two research questions were formulated that served as the foundation for this study:

1. To what extent instructors agree with using student ratings of teaching for purposes of improving teaching?
2. Are there differences among instructors' perceptions of using student ratings for teaching purposes between NCNU and VNU-HCMC?

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1. Using Student Ratings of Teaching for Improving Teaching

The most important purpose of student ratings is improving instructors' teaching of their courses. Many studies have found that results regarding using student ratings for improving teaching staff instruction. In a meta-analysis Cohen (1980:339) claimed that "student ratings are a valuable source for improving instruction at the college level." However, some studies found no effects on instruction from student rating. Rotem and Glasman (1979, as cited in Yao and Grady 2005, p.507) reported that "feedback from student ratings does not seem to be effective for the purpose of improving performance of university teachers."

2.2. Instructors' Attitudes on Using Student Ratings

Some studies claim a more positive outlook of instructors on utilization of student evaluations of teaching in general (Beran and Rokosh, 2009; Schmelkin et al., 1997; Beran et al., 2002, 2005). However, there are still negative attitudes on this issue (Kulik & McKeachie, 1975). Basically, instructors tend to accept that student ratings of teaching are an acceptable means of instructional improvement, but some skepticism about student ratings still exists.

Student ratings of teaching surveys are administered anonymous at the end of each term and completed before final exams are taken, VNU-HCMC uses a paper and pencil survey while NCNU uses a web-based survey. VNU-HCMC's questionnaire includes following primary sections: student background information (6 items); course information (5 items); ratings for course content (7 items), lecturers' teaching activities (16 items); overall ratings (2 items) and respondents' comments on course content, course reference material, lecture teaching activities, performance evaluation methods, and facilities. NCNU's rating survey is divided into four parts: student-self evaluation (5 items); students' rating for the course (11 items); and other alternative evaluations: students' rating

of the course is taught in English (3 items), students' rating of physical education (2 items), students' rating of school services (1 item); and a final open questions (2 items). Student ratings are collected, and analyzed by school testing staffs, summarized statistics and reports are made available to instructors, the University president and faculty deans, department heads and viewed as evidences of professionalism teaching activities.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

3.1. Participants

This study was conducted at NCNU and VNU-HCMC. NCNU has 270 and VNU-HCMC has 2722 full-time teaching staff¹. The questionnaire was randomly sent to full-time faculty. Valid responses in NCNU are 25 and 35 from VNU-HCMC. This study used random sampling with demographic information for participants include gender, academic rank, academic title, years of teaching experience.

3.2. Instrumentation

The study used questionnaire survey to collect data. The survey, consisted of three sections, was developed by the researchers with counseling from assessment experts and referring to other studies concerning student ratings of teaching or student evaluation of teaching. Exception demographic variables, 24 items of two last sections use five-point Likert scale, which score 5 presenting the highest level of agreement (see appendix).

3.3. Procedure

The questionnaire survey was posted on a free online survey website and made available to full-time teaching staff from October 1st to October 30th, 2012 by sending them an email with the link to this website. We also explained the study purpose and called their help for completing the

¹ Academic year 2011-2012

survey. Response number of NCNU is 25 and VNU-HCMC is 35. The data from the survey was entered into SPSS.

Sample distribution of the study is not normal distribution, so median, interquartile range of descriptive statistics and inferential statistics Mann-Whitney U Test will be used. The study gathered a small sample, parametric statistics with more power is not appropriate.

4. FINDINGS

The questionnaires asked for demographic information about each participant, including gender, academic title, and years of experience. As shown in Table 1, female sample and male sample was not quite different. Majority of instructors in VNU-HCMC have been holding masters' degree (50%), meanwhile 53% of NCNU participants have been doctorate. Most of VNU-HCMC instructors was lecturers, 6% was professor and associate professor comparing with 56% of professor and associate professor in NCNU. The median of teaching experience was 8 for teaching staff at VNU-HCMC and 9 for NCNU. In this study, NCNU sample was at higher level of academic rank and academic title than VNU-HCMC sample.

Table 1. Distribution of faculty members' background variables

Background Variables		VNU-HCMC		NCNU		Median
		Frequency	Percentage (%)	Frequency	Percentage (%)	
Gender	Male	18	53	11	49	
	Female	16	47	14	51	
Academic title	Bachelor degree	7	21			
	Masters' degree	17	50	2	8	
	Doctorate degree	10	29	22	92	

	Lecturer	23	74		
	Senior lecturer	3	10	4	16
Academic rank	Assist. Professor			7	28
	Assoc. professor	1	3	12	48
	Full professor	1	3	2	8
Years of teaching experience	≤ 5 years	13	40	3	13
	6-20 years	14	42	20	87
	> 21 years	6	18		

The first research question was addressed in following section. Table 2 displayed participant perceptions on using student ratings for teaching purposes at VNU-HCM. The results indicated that in general, participants rate highly on using student ratings for *improving overall teaching quality* (*median=4*) and *refining teaching method* (*median=4*) in both VNU-HCMC and NCNU. Exception *Improving instructors' treatment of students*, other student rating using purposes were higher scores on ratings of NCNU teachers in comparing with VNU-HCMC teachers. It could be said that teaching staff in NCNU find that using student ratings for course improvement is more useful than these of VNU-HCMC teaching staff.

Table 2. Median of using student ratings for teaching purposes according to lecturer perceptions

Student ratings used to	VNU-HCMC		NCNU	
	Median	Percentile 75	Median	Percentile 75
Improving overall teaching quality	4	5	4	4.5
Improving instructors' treatment of students	4	5	3	4
Refining instructional objectives	3	4	3	4
Refining teaching contents	3	4	4	5
Refining teaching methods	4	5	4	4
Modifying mid – term and final exams	3	4	4	5
Altering course textbooks	3	4	4	4
Selecting support material	3	4	4	5

In Table 3 we sorted out five of the sixteen items which were different rating scores in term of comparing between NCNU teachers and VNU-HCMC teachers. VNU-HCMC teachers were highly agreement on *The same instrument of student ratings can't be appropriate for all courses of different disciplines*, whereas NCNU teachers were more agreement on *Faculty members in general to tend to water down their requirements in order to get favorable ratings, Most of students take the evaluation process seriously, If the evaluation was given at an earlier point in the semester I would use the student feedback right away, I am improving my teaching or my course from semester to semester based on ratings of students.*

Table 3. Instructors' median of agreement ratings

Student ratings used to	VNU-HCMC		NCNU	
	Median	Percentile	Median	Percentile
		75		75
The same instrument of student ratings can't be appropriate for all courses of different disciplines	4	5	2	3
Faculty members in general to tend to water down their requirements in order to get favorable ratings	2	3	4	4
Most of students take the evaluation process seriously	3	3	4	4
If the evaluation was given at an earlier point in the semester I would use the student feedback right away	3	4	4	4
I am improving my teaching or my course from semester to semester based on ratings of students	3.5	4	4	4

Regarding answer research question 2, we applied nonparametric statistics for considering differences among instructors' perceptions of using student ratings for teaching purposes between NCNU and VNU-HCMC because data did not meet the parametric assumptions of the t-test. The Mann-Whitney U Test tests for differences between two groups on ordinal variables with no specific distribution. We used two independently sampled groups of NCNU and VNU-HCMC and assessed whether two groups differ on 24 single, continuous variables. The Mann-Whitney U is conceptually similar to the t-test for determining whether two sampled groups are from a single population. Ten out of 24 items were found having statically significant differences at confidence level 95%. In which, VNU-HCMC more approved on these statements *Improving instructors'*

treatment of students, Refining teaching methods, The same instrument of student ratings cannot be appropriate for all courses of different disciplines. Otherwise, NCNU instructors had significantly different evaluation with VNU-HCMC on these items: Refining teaching contents, Modifying mid-term and final exams, Modifying mid-term and final exams, Altering course textbooks, Selecting support material, Ratings of students consistent with peer observations or/and own assessment, Most of students take the evaluation process seriously, If the evaluation was given at an earlier point in the semester I would use the student feedback right away.

Table 4. Mann-Whitney U test results of instructor perceptions among two universities.

Factor	Background variables	Mean rank	Sig. (2-tailed)
Improving instructors' treatment of students	VNU-HCMC	36	.003
	NCNU	23	
Refining teaching contents	VNU-HCMC	29	.008
	NCNU	32	
Refining teaching methods	VNU-HCMC	35	.012
	NCNU	24	
Modifying mid-term and final exams	VNU-HCMC	24	.000
	NCNU	40	
Altering course textbooks	VNU-HCMC	25	.006
	NCNU	38	
Selecting support material	VNU-HCMC	25	.003
	NCNU	38	
The same instrument of student ratings cannot be appropriate for all courses of different disciplines	VNU-HCMC	39	.000
	NCNU	17	
Ratings of students consistent with peer observations	VNU-HCMC	24	.013

or/and own assessment	NCNU	35	
Most of students take the evaluation process seriously	VNU-HCMC	26	.007
	NCNU	37	
If the evaluation was given at an earlier point in the semester I would use the student feedback right away	VNU-HCMC	24	.000
	NCNU	40	
Significance level: 95%			

5. CONCLUSION.

Student rating of teaching is not a new topic in higher education, yet there is still no comparative study of Taiwanese and Vietnamese instructors' perceptions. This study is based on a sample of 60 instructors. Our results indicate that: (a) approve and support usefulness of student rating results for instructional improvement from NCNU side was stronger than these of VNU-HCMC side; (b) VNU-HCMC showed that the same instrument of student ratings can't be appropriate for all courses of different disciplines; (c) Faculty members in general tend to water down their requirements in order to get favorable ratings according to NCNU teachers' perceptions.

Limitations to this study include the fact that the data was collected at two universities, and may not generalize to other universities or colleges. Therefore, the researchers suggested further researches will be needed with larger, multi-institutional samples to better understand instructor's perceptions about the use of student ratings for instructional improvement.

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