

Evaluating the Evaluator: A Reflective Approach

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Abstract

Quality is a buzzword associated with education at all levels, especially in the leading private universities in Bangladesh. Quality education is made synonymous with the quality of classroom performance of the faculty members, which has led to the introduction of the quality development program through the evaluation of the faculty members by the students. This paper argues that Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET) program is bound to fail because it emphasizes only the faculty performance, missing the main point of student learning and thus bringing in strong reservation and silent resistance against it by the faculty members. The paper, therefore, advocates for Reflective approach of faculty development program that ensures quality assurance and enhancement without anxiety and resistance from the faculty members.

Keywords: SET-Peer Observation of Teaching-POT Models-Reflective Approach of POT-Implementation

1. Introduction

With the establishment of private universities in Bangladesh, the focus of importance has shifted from the faculty members towards the students. Student satisfaction, which has so far been neglected in the public universities, has got a vigorous momentum with the visible effort of empowering the students to evaluate their course tutors at the end of the semester. Amid the murmuring grudge of the faculty members, the Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET) is introduced in some of the private universities in order to ensure quality education through student satisfaction. This paper argues that Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET) is not an effective measure to ensure the quality of classroom performance of the teachers and any evaluative measures to ensure quality is bound to fail for the lack of support from the faculty members because the faculty members 'see them as threatening, potentially arbitrary and judgmental' (Cosh 1999) and Ackerman et al (2009), therefore, propose the replacement of Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET) by a more pragmatic approach of Peer Observation of Teaching (POT).

Peer Observation of Teaching (POT) is a key element of academic development. It is a collaborative quality enhancement program that 'describes the activity of visiting and commenting upon a taught session with a view to both improving the student learning experience, and providing professional development for the teaching staff' (Robinson 2010). Bell (2005) defines Peer Observation of Teaching (POT) as 'collaborative, developmental activity in which professionals offer mutual support by observing each other teach; explaining and discussing what was observed; sharing ideas about teaching; gathering student feedback on teaching effectiveness; reflecting on understandings, feelings, actions and feedback and trying out new ideas'.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET)

The Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET) evolves from and revolves round a conception that the teacher must acquire some characteristics to be assessed by the students, the absence of which will make him fail as a teacher. Freyd (1923) suggests such attributes as alertness, sense of humor, tact, patience, acceptance of criticism, and interestingly neatness in dress. Smalzried and Remmers (1927) list '10 traits' among which presentation of the subject matter, fairness in grading, personal appearance and personal peculiarities are included. More list of 'characteristics' or 'traits' are added up producing several thousand publication (Marsh 2007) with one of the latest publications 'Teaching Tips: Strategies, Research, and Theory for College and University Teachers', currently in its 13th edition (Svinicki & McKeachie, 2010). But the attitude remains the same with the students grading the teacher, which is to be used in the promotion decision for the faculties.

2.2. Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET) Invalid and Unreliable:

The teachers resultantly voice their concerns against SET, and question its validity and reliability. Recent research also validates the concerns, apprehension and distrust expressed by the teachers. One of the main shortcomings of SET is it incorporates the criteria that barely assess 'teaching effectiveness and actual learning', rather emphasizes 'the instructor personality and likeability' (Clayson & Sheffet, 2006). Lang (2007) argues that the knowledge that students gain from a course should be direct function of teaching effectiveness, but SET often stresses other factors that have little to do with actual learning. Chonko, Tanner and Davis (2002) finds that

the top six expectations cited by the students from their teachers are that the instructor is interesting, helps students, communicates well, is easy to talk to, has good personality, and is kind. The students neglect the core issue of whether the teacher is knowledgeable and is concerned about the learning of the students. The most common concern expressed against SET is that it influences both grades and grade expectation; expected grades often produce positive ratings while rigor and particularity is retaliated with the lower ratings for the rigorous teacher (Wright 2006). So with such concerns and apprehension in mind, a teacher may 'lower the standard' of education and 'inflate the grades' (Churchill, 2006). Other instructor factors may also contribute to positive or negative ratings by the students. Susan and Lulie (2012) argue that SET may also be influenced by Instructor factors such the similarity of the thinking styles between students and the teacher, gender, race, religion, ethnicity, age and even smartness of the teacher.

2.3. Peer Observation of Review (POR):

The anxiety and concerns that the faculty members feel towards the Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET) have brought in an improved version of teaching evaluation program –Peer Observation Review (POR) in which colleagues evaluate their fellow colleagues and write a post-observational reports on the class performance of the faculty observed. Seldin (1999) reports that the use of Peer Observation Review (POR) nearly tripled between 1978 and 1998. DeZure (1999) suggests that Peer Observation Review (POR) is more valid than SET for evaluating such learning criteria as substantive content, pedagogical content and ethical standard of practice. But this new approach has also failed to win the hearts of the faculty members- the main stakeholders because they still see the haunting ghost of 'evaluation' in the new set up as well. They expect a mechanism to be effective to ensure both the quality of teaching and faculty development simultaneously, which will not be used in the promotion process. Keig (2000) concludes that teaching is more likely to improve when evaluative programs are expressly designed for instructional improvement rather than through promotion process.

2.4. Peer Observation of Teaching (POT):

The faculty expectation of non-evaluative mechanism seems to have materialized through the introduction of Peer Observation of Teaching (POT) as a quality enhancement tool rather than quality assurance mechanism, with its main objectives being to help academics to examine their teaching for the purpose of self-improvement and to establish a good practice as a means of enhancing student learning. (Lomas and Kinchin, 2006). Hutchings (1994) suggests that there are three main arguments for the Peer Observation of Teaching (POT) that should be considered by the academic community:

- To encourage collaboration amongst academic staff in order to share ideas and good practice;
- To ensure that the enhancement of teaching is largely the remit of professionals rather than members of outside agencies; and
- To supplement student evaluations of teaching (SET) with the comments of respected colleagues and thereby provide multiple data sources.

Gosling (2002) identifies three models for Peer Observation of Teaching (POT), each of which aims to enhance the quality of teaching with some evaluative attitude in it:

1. Evaluative Model
2. Developmental Model
3. Peer Review Model

Gosling's first model is summative while model 2 and model 3 are formative. In the first model, head of the department or some senior faculty members observe the class performance of the junior colleagues and have a post-observational discussion session with the faculty observed followed by an administrative report. In the second model, professional faculty developer or teacher trainers observe the class of a lecturer followed by the post-observational sitting in order to help the faculty observed to overcome the shortcomings in his teaching technique and style. The third model involves two same ranking faculty members, usually lecturers, observing each other and having post-observational sittings with an aim to improve teaching quality. Though the observation takes place among the peers or colleagues in all these three models, still there's the ghost of administrative evaluation the faculties so desperately want to get rid of. In all the models, the observers are chosen, consulted, instructed and guided by the administration leading to the final submission of the reports either in writing or oral to the administration, which will eventually be used in the promotional process of the faculty. With the same concerns and anxiety as in the Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET) and Peer Observation Review (POR), the faculty cannot enhance his self-learning in full freedom.

Cosh (1999) mentions three more models of Peer Observation of Teaching:

1. Model 1: Peer Observation on agreed criteria: Colleagues observe each other against a background of agreed criteria followed by constructive feedback, and discussion. The aim of the observation is to help improve the skills of the observed.
2. Model 2: Pair Mentoring: Two teachers work together, observing each other's lessons, discussing areas of mutual interest and planning future strategies (Whisker 1996).

3. Model 3: Videoed Lesson: Teachers watch the some parts or full of the videoed class of the particular teacher followed by discussion and suggestion for future development. (Claydon and McDowell 1993)

These three models seem to be more constructive and acceptable as they are conducted with no promotional purpose under the administrative guidance. Furthermore, they usually emphasize the importance of trust, supportiveness, and the recognition and development of good practice, rather than the locating and correcting of bad practice (Brown, Jones, and Rawnsley (1993). But still these models are based on the development of the person observed, and on the assumption that people improve and develop best through the comments and knowledge of others (Cosh 1999). The models neglect the development of the persons observing the active teaching in the classroom, but 'genuine development comes about through self-awareness, reflection and open-mindedness to other approaches and styles' (Cosh 1999).

With the apparent shortcomings, incompatibility and subsequent failure of Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET), Peer Observation Review (POR) and Peer Observation of Teaching (POT) as faculty development programs, research is needed in order to find out a better faculty development program which is more compatible in Bangladeshi context.

3. Research Context

Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET) is an absolutely administrative decision imposed on both of the students and faculties of private universities in Bangladesh without in-depth feasibility and compatibility research. Neither the students are provided with proper guidance, and training nor are the faculty members consulted and motivated. Resultantly, the students don't understand the significance of the evaluation process and its direct and indirect impact on teaching and learning improvement and there is a sense of dissatisfaction, humiliation and silent resistance from the faculty members. And most importantly, SET report, however good, has no bearing on the salary increase and promotion while bad SET report is frowned upon and discussed humiliatingly among the administration and colleagues. On the other hand, Peer Observation Review (POR) and Peer Observation of Teaching (POT) are taboos to the Bangladeshi faculty members as teachers here have culturally not been familiar with the concept of accepting the presence of any observer in their class. Under the circumstances, research need is felt to develop a faculty development program which is faculty friendly and acceptable in Bangladeshi context.

4. Method

4.1 The study tries to understand the student attitude towards the Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET) and faculty perceptions of the Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET) and Peer Observation of Teaching (POT). A total of 100 fifth semester literature students of Department of English Language and Literature at International Islamic University Chittagong, Bangladesh are chosen for the study. A questionnaire (Table I) of close ended question of Likert chart of 'strongly agree to strongly disagree' was distributed among the students to be returned with the feedback and a total of 20 faculty members of English Departments from three private universities are provided with the Likert chart questionnaire (Table 2 and Table 3).

4.2 The first questionnaire in the Table 1 tries to understand the reliability and validity of Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET) through measuring the students' awareness, knowledge and seriousness about SET, which points out their intellectual ability to gauge the quality teaching and learning outcome. The second and the third questionnaires in the Table 2 and Table 3 explore the faculty attitude and perceptions about being evaluated by the students and the colleagues respectively.

5. Research Result

5.1 The questionnaire in Table 1 shows a horrible scenario of validity and reliability of student ratings in our settings. The two most despairing findings are 60% and 40% of the students are unaware of the significance and seriousness of the student ratings respectively. Despite the fact that 60% of them give high ratings to the good teacher, 34% can ascertain the strength and weakness of the teacher and 37% understand the quality teaching, there are alarming data of 25% strongly agreeing and 43% agreeing to 'high rating is affected by good grade'. 20% strongly agree and 27% agree to the relation of ratings to personal relationship and likeability between the student and the faculty. Political, social and religious issues also greatly (29% agree and 34% unaware) influence the student ratings. Under this horrible situation in our context and setting, Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET) cannot be accepted as reliable and valid criterion to evaluate the faculty.

Table 1: Student attitude towards Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET)

		Strongly agree	Agree	undecided	disagree	Strongly disagree
1	You clearly understand the significance of Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET)	3%	23%	60%	12%	2%
2	You treat SET seriously	5%	20%	40%	23%	12%
3	You always give high ratings to the good teacher	66%	27%	2%	2%	3%
4	High rating is affected by high grade	25%	43%	19%	11%	2%
5	Personal relationship and likeability affect the ratings	20%	27%	42%	5%	6%
6	Political, social, religious issues affect the ratings	21%	29%	34%	7%	9%
7	Student ratings contribute to teacher development	15%	26%	33%	17%	9%
8	You exactly evaluate a teacher depending on his strength and weakness	10%	34%	30%	16%	10%
9	You clearly understand the quality of teaching	14%	23%	37%	17%	9%
10	Your ratings reflect your learning outcome	7%	23%	25%	22%	23%

5.2. Faculty dissatisfaction and resistance about the student ratings can be seen from the table 2 with 65% (40% disagree, 25% strongly disagree) faculty believing that students do not understand the significance of the evaluation while 53% (37% disagree, 16% strongly disagree) faculty members think the students are not knowledgeable enough to evaluate the quality of their teaching. Some positive attitudes seen in the responses 7,9 and 10 are overshadowed by the strongest negativity in the statements 4 and 5. A great majority of the faculty members (77%=disagree 41%, strongly disagree 36%) negate the idea of considering student ratings in the promotional and incremental process while 92% (strongly disagree 48%, disagree 44%) are against use of poor student ratings against them in the administrative measures.

Table 2: Faculty attitude towards Student Evaluation of Teaching

		Strongly agree	Agree	undecided	disagree	Strongly disagree
1	Students understand the significance of the evaluation	10%	15%	10%	40%	25%
2	Students have knowledge to judge the quality of teaching.	12%	15%	20%	37%	16%
3	Students treat SET seriously	8%	15%	25%	31%	21%
4	Student ratings should be considered for promotion and salary increase	7%	10%	6%	41%	36%
5	Bad SET report must have administrative steps against the faculty	0%	5%	3%	44%	48%
6	Good ratings depend on likeability and personal relation with the students	33%	42%	7%	13%	5%
7	SET undermines student teacher relations	15%	21%	19%	34%	11%
8	Social, political and religious issues affect the student ratings	22%	35%	22%	15%	6%
9	Student ratings point out the strength and weakness of the faculty	14%	22%	21%	33%	10%
10	Student ratings help the faculty to improve his/her teaching	12%	35%	23%	19%	11%

5.3. The responses in the Table 3 show mixed feelings of resistance and acceptance of the faculty members towards Peer observation of Teaching (POT). First two responses (statement 1 and 2) are horribly frustrating as 100% of faculty neither have evaluated any peer nor have been evaluated by any peer in their teaching career. Resultantly, 77% (46% strongly agree, 31% agree) of the faculty have strong anxiety at the presence of any observer in their class. But surprisingly enough, despite high ratio of unawareness (55% and 38%) of the faculty in the responses 4 and 5, there are positive attitudes towards POT. 45% (20 strongly agree, 25 agree) faculty accept the role of peer observation in developing quality teaching while 47% (Strongly agree 12%, agree 35%) think that peer observation increases cooperation and collaboration among the faculty. But the 74% (strongly agree 31, agree 43) faculty support to response 10 opens a new chapter of peer evaluation, which emphasizes the importance of learning by the observer rather than the faculty observed.

Table 3: Faculty perception of Peer Observation of Teaching (POT)

		Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	You have been evaluated by your colleague.	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
2	You have evaluated your colleague.	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
3	You will feel uncomfortable and unnerved at the presence an observer in your class?	46%	31%	10%	7%	6%
4	Peer Observation is necessary for teacher development.	10%	20%	55%	6%	9%
5	You agree to allow an observer to be in your class if not imposed.	15%	11%	38%	13%	23%
6	Peer Observation helps the faculty improve his/her teaching.	20%	25%	30%	15%	10%
7	The observer should always be a senior colleague preferably professor or at least Associate Professor	11%	14%	16%	47%	12%
8	Peer observation increases faculty cooperation and collaboration.	12%	35%	16%	23%	14%
9	Peer observation report to be used for promotional, incremental or punitive purpose	0%	1%	5%	56%	38%
10	The observer can benefit more than the one observed.	31%	43%	7%	11%	8%

6. Discussion

The study has shown that in Bangladeshi context, Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET) is invalid and unreliable as our students are not properly trained, knowledgeable and motivated for the purpose. The high percentage of political bias among the students, high grade expectation in return for good student ratings and personal likeability as seen the Table I make SET completely incompatible in the present educational set up in the Bangladeshi universities. The view is substantiated by the faculty attitude towards SET. The faculty members express their concerns, feel humiliated and want the SET result, good or bad, not to be used for the promotional and punitive process.

Peer Observation Review (POR) which proposes written peer report is strongly opposed by the faculty in the response 9 of the Table 3 because of its evaluative nature. Moreover, the participant faculty members in the study have never been in process of either evaluating any peer or being evaluated resulting in their anxiety and unwillingness at the presence of any observer in their class for evaluation purpose. Though they are aware of the increase of cooperation and collaboration (statement 8, Table 3) through peer observation, they are not ready to allow entrance to any senior colleague into their class for evaluation. Last two responses (9 and 10) are strikingly important to understand the sort of development program the Bangladeshi faculty members prefer. Their almost whole hearted (94%) opposition to the peer observation report to be used in the administrative purpose is indicative of their preference for a policy of teacher development program that does not point out hundreds of shortcomings followed by a horde of suggestions and corrections by the senior colleagues who visit the class. And response 10 clarifies the preference of the Bangladeshi faculty and the need for a new policy that does not seek to evaluate by visiting classes of the peer, rather emphasizes the learning points of the visitor from the teacher whose class is observed. The study, therefore, suggests *the Reflective Approach of Peer Observation of Teaching (RAPOT)* as better and more compatible faculty development program for our faculty.

7. Suggestions:

7.1 Reflective Approach of Peer Observation of Teaching (RAPOT):

Shift of focus from the observed faculty to the observing faculty is the essence of reflective approach. (RAPOT). The role of the observer here is distinctly that of a learner. Richardson (2000) feels when an observer assumes the stance of a student of teaching, rather than an evaluator of teaching, great discoveries are possible. In a reflective approach, peer observation is not an evaluative mechanism. The observed faculty doesn't feel threatened with the post-observational discussion phobia, where his shortcomings will surface the discussion table and the hundreds of corrective suggestions will come up from the observing faculties. He does not have any promotional anxiety out of the observation; rather he is a dignified disseminator of the teaching styles, techniques and approaches and the observer faculty is simply gleaner of variety of resources from the observed faculty. Learning (for the observer), then, it would seem, almost naturally happens through peer observation (Richardson 2000)

7.2 Process of Reflective Approach of Peer Observation of Teaching (RAPOT):

Learning the teaching mystery for the observing faculty is a great fun in the process of Reflective Approach of Peer Observation of Teaching (RAPOT); but this fun should not turn out to be funny after a while and fade away with the passage of time. So, the paper proposes the process to be institutionalized under the departmental supervision.

7.2.1. There should be departmental monitoring of the schedule of peer observation under a coordinator. The coordinator's job might be to prepare a semester-wise observation schedule among the peers and make sure that observation is held as per the schedule between/among the particular faculties. He may prepare the feedback form or sheet for the observing faculty so that the learning issues and points might be shared or discussed among the observed and observing faculties. The coordinator may also organize workshop, seminar and discussion meetings where the observing faculties may share and disseminate their learning points from the particular class observation of the particular faculties.

7.2.2 The junior colleagues should have preference to choose his area of interest or course of interest and choose the senior colleagues of his/her liking for the peer observation session in order to learn the in-depth knowledge and technique for teaching the course. The coordinator must ensure that the observing and to be observed faculties must have pre-observation discussion session so that the junior colleague may have a clear idea of what is going to take place in the classroom of the senior colleague he is going to observe. The post-observation discussion session attended by the coordinator and the head of the department must highlight the strength of the observed senior colleague, and the learning the junior colleague has gleaned from his observation. The coordinator may also arrange some counter- peer observation of junior colleague's class to be observed by the senior colleague so that he can also benefit from the diverse experiences the junior colleague has been getting from his visit to many senior colleagues' classes.

7.2.3. The use of technology may be of great help in the Reflective Approach of Peer Observation of Teaching (RAPOT). A class of senior or junior colleague may be videoed with prior permission and schedule to be watched by the observer at his convenient time. There must be post-watching discussion session between the observing and observed faculties focusing the learning points of the observing faculty. A senior faculty may conduct some online classes to be observed by both the junior and senior colleagues and have a post-observational online video conference on skype or on any other audio/ video webliner conferencing software discussing the strength of the observed faculty and the learning points of the attendee faculties. The online class conduction attended by the peers should be on departmental schedule so that all of the faculty members get the opportunity to both observe and conduct the class in turn at least once in a semester.

8. Conclusion

Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory gives us much of insight into the fact that social learning takes place from observation and imitation of how others behave in certain particular situation: 'Fortunately, most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling: from observing other, one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action'. So, any learning including faculty development process best happens through the observation and imitation of those observed behaviors. Observational knowledge leading to imitation, coupled with innovation out of faculty's self-knowledge and skill, may enhance faculty's insightful knowledge in the course s/he teaches, improve his teaching techniques and styles, help him incorporate a variety of approaches observed and all combined will make him/ her a quality teacher, eventually ensuring quality education that our universities have now been looking for in the process of Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET).

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