

The Examination of Strength and Weakness of Online Evaluation of Faculty Members Teaching by Students in the University of Isfahan

Ansary Maryam

PhD Scholar, Philosophy of Education, Faculty of Educational Sciences and Psychology

University of Isfahan, Isfahan, Iran

Tel: 98-311-793-2543 E-mail: ansaryy1260@yahoo.com

Shavakhi Alireza

PhD Scholar, Philosophy of Education, Faculty of Educational Sciences and Psychology

University of Isfahan and Teacher of Teacher Training Center, Isfahan, Iran

Tel: 98-311-793-2543 E-mail: shavakhi2007@gmail.com

Nasr Ahmad Reza

Professor of curriculum Planning, Faculty of Educational Sciences and Psychology

University of Isfahan, Isfahan, Iran

Tel: 98-311-793-2315 E-mail: Arnasr@edu.ui.ac.ir

Arbabisarjou Azizollah

Faculty member, Zahedan school of Nursing and Midwifery, Zahedan University of Medical Sciences

Zahedan, Iran

Tel: 98-541-2442481 E-mail: derranneh2005@yahoo.com

Received: December 29, 2011 Accepted: January 12, 2012 Published: March 1, 2012

doi:10.5539/hes.v2n1p38

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/hes.v2n1p38>

Abstract

Evaluation of faculty members' teaching is a device for recognition of their ability in teaching, assessing, the student's learning and it can improve efficiency of faculty members in teaching. In terms of growth of computer's technologies improvement of universities and its effect on achievement and information processing, it is necessary to use this technologies. This study examined the recognition of strengths and weakness in online evaluation at universities. This study has used quality method & information obtained from group interview. Statistical population includes all of student's of 30 departments in University of Isfahan. Statistical samples were ten departments at basic sciences and education. Category and coding method used for information analysis. Some of the strengths in online evaluation are costs decreasing, easy analysis, possibility of evaluation form completing out of class place and time, without psychological pressure due to professor appearance in class, and easy performance. Some of the weaknesses are lack of the fast and comfortable achievement to internet and website at the certain time, compulsory in form completion and entering to website with username and password, and stress for student to become known.

Keywords: Educational evaluation, Online evaluation, Quality of faculty members' teaching

1. Introduction

By entering the third millennium and emerging the electronic industries and especially its admission into the higher education, the world has encountered deep changes which can be called digital revolution. These changes in human's life have extended so that administrators and politicians of countries have decided to manage governmental and non-governmental organizations and institutions electronically. The internet evaluation methods are proper replacements for conventional ones in higher education. Assessment and evaluation of faculty members' teaching is device for recognition of their ability in teaching, assessing, the student's learning and it can improve quality and

quantity of faculty efficiency in teaching and it cause real and fair feedback and increasing of job satisfaction and improving of performance.

In fact, evaluation of faculty is determining the rate of professors' success that in educational purposes. Evaluation of faculty member's is process that judge ability and adequacy of faculties and with collecting information about professor performance, especially teaching. It also makes necessity to make decisions that can increase the ability of teaching and improvement of learner's learning (Gils, Martin, Bryce and Hendry, 2004).

So purposes of teaching evaluation are including:

- 1) Improving teaching quality
- 2) Knowing the professors ability at teaching
- 3) A criterion for promoting and retraining of professors
- 4) Providing the information for doing educational researches and
- 5) Helping to students for choosing the professors.

There are different methods for teaching evaluation likes managers evaluation, peer evaluation, students, self assessment, observation of teaching by experts, examining content and outlines, certain assignment for students and their exams, and student's learning. In student method that is the most usual at higher education (Timpson and Andrew, 1997), usually there is an evaluation questionnaire includes amount of question about professors educational performance that student can evaluate his professor (Pounder, 2008). Some researches show that student's idea of professor is affected by things that don't have any relation with professor's teaching quality. There are many supports for this research and some disagreement with them. Supporters of this kind of evaluation believe that students have a kind of metacognition that causes their positive evaluation of faculty. However opponents believe that student judgment is mental, so it is invaluable. Students don't have right perception of teaching process so they don't have suitable judgment or sometimes students ideas about faculty members are affected by fame, popularity, beauty and administrable situation and some students enter their dislikes or loveless in their evaluation.

1.1 Online Evaluation Method

Higher education in our country has a short history in online evaluation of professors; therefore there are valid research references in this aspect. Universities in other countries have also little history in terms of online evaluation, but some research references can be addressed to (Henderson, 2001; Ha and Marsh, 1998; Dommeyer et al, 2004; Ku, 2003).

Considering the research history, online evaluation method is performed so that the students answer the questions by using their passwords online. The internet evaluation method is an innovative and new method and it takes time to get familiar with and apply it. So it is clear that the students prefer to take part in conventional evaluations. Layne et al (1999), investigated how the method of evaluation (in-class versus online) affected the response rate to a faculty evaluation, they found that the in-class survey produced a higher response rate than the online method (%60.6 versus %47.8).

On the other hand, there are many advantages associated with the use of information technology to support approaches to evaluation. As example: using web- based evolution questionnaires can bypass many of the bottlenecks in the evaluation system. (e.g. data entry and administration) and more to a more "just in time" evaluation model. Another advantage is avoiding the need to administer surveys in class (Nulty, 2008). Also in online evaluation system, many of the cost of the traditional method can be avoided, i.e. the costs of printing, distributing, collection, scanning and storing the paper survey, the costs of typing students, responses to open-ended questions and the costs of delivering hard copy summary reports to faculty. Also flexibility, high speed in calculation, possibility of independent assessment out of time and place for students are another advantages (Barkhi, 2010; Nulty, 2008).

There are some common features to online surveying practice. A typical on-line evaluation involves: giving students assurance that their responses will be de-identified and that aggregate reports will be available only after the final grades that are determined, providing students with using their student ID number, students responding numerically to multiple response items and typing answers to open- ended questions. Providing students with a receipt verifying that they have completed the evaluation and providing at least 1 mount in which the students can respond, usually near the end of term (Dommeyer et al, 2004; Nulty, 2008).

Moreover, Layne and et al (1999) claimed that their researches showed that they prefer to use the computerized evaluation to evaluate professors and had the fewest problems in gaining access to network. Also, the same results were achieved in a national research on 58288 students that the rate of responses to the computerized evaluation is

as satisfactory as of the in-class evaluation. Although, there has been cited various advantages resulted from the computerized evaluation, but some researchers has claimed also disadvantages for the method. Couper (2000) reported that of the most important disadvantages in computerized evaluation, is uncertainly about how to receive and answer the questionnaire while Dommeyer et al (2002) suggested the delay in answering the computerized evaluation.

Thus, the purpose of present study is to answer the following questions:

- a) What is the online evaluation of strengths?
- b) What are the weaknesses of online evaluation?
- c) Which University would you prefer to use a type of evaluation? Traditional or online?
- d) What is your suggestion for better performance of online evaluation?

1.2 Online Evaluation Method in University of Isfahan

University of Isfahan has paid special attention to evaluation of teaching method of its faculty members since many years ago by forming an evaluation committee. Considering the developments in computer technologies in the universities and their efficiency in achieving the more exact information and because of increasing volume of affairs and rapidity in performances and saving the costs, the evaluation committee has decided to apply computerized evaluation system. Due to lack of knowledge and information in this field, it was agreed to use simultaneously both conventional and computerized systems, and to put into effect the changes gradually and more deliberately in order to minimize the possible errors and problems. In this regard, University of Isfahan started to investigate and plan in this field extensively, brought into effect computerized evaluations in some of the education groups from second semester in 2007-8. At first, the computerized evaluation was performed in three groups, faculty of basic sciences (mathematics group), faculty of education (consultation group), and faculty of technical and engineering (computer group). In the following semester and in other groups, some courses were put under the computerized evaluations, so that 195 professors were evaluated through internet. This trend is also kept on in 2009, and all educational groups are to complete computerized evaluation questionnaires in some of their course. The students are informed through conventional announcements in bulletin board, website of university of Isfahan, and student system. In first and second semesters, the students were promoted to complete computer evaluation, and in the third semester, they are obligated to complete the computerized evaluation questionnaires before enrolling in new semester or accessing to their computerized file or dossier. So, the students cannot access to their grades or select units until they complete the evaluation forms. Recognizing the weaknesses and strengths of this trend of evaluating the professors in terms of teaching quality can assist education programmers and planners to enhance and improve the quality of evaluation system. Therefore, the present study was done in University of Isfahan to meet this goal. University is one of the famous and governmental universities of the country; it includes about 15000 students and 500 faculty members. It is to say that one of the necessary comparisons is percentage of participants in each of evaluations, conventional and computerized, and the mean of professors' scores from evaluations. This aspect is dealt with in a separate paper by the authors of present study.

2. Method

The present study was performed by qualitative method. The statistical population of this study consisted of all students of 30 educational groups in different faculties of University of Isfahan, who performed the computerized evaluations for three courses. Of the selected colleges, it was selected ten educational groups of which five groups were from faculty of educational sciences and psychology (including groups of consultation, psychology, curriculum, educational administration, and library sciences) and five groups from faculty of sciences (statistics, mathematics, biology, physics, and chemistry). The information and data were gathered by group interviews. The participants who were interviewed were of masters students from educational groups, participating in both conventional and internet evaluation. Each group was consisted of ten people and total of 100 people. The most of them were female. The interviews were conducted in the form of group discussions in September and October of 2010, and each session lasted for about 30 to 45 min. Each session was performed as follows:

It was designated a time for session in each group in coordination with supervisor, and students in one of the courses gathered together in one of the classes in the college and then the interview was begun. The researcher explained the necessary points about the conventional and internet evaluation and about the goals of the research, then the questions were posed.

The opinions of students were written down on the blackboard and the students discussed about each of these items and the ideas pro and con were determined for each of items. The ideas of each group were gathered and then the items were categorized and coded, and after analyzing them, the weaknesses and strengths of internet evaluation

were defined.

3. Findings

In terms of the questions of the research, the findings related to each question are offered specifically as follows:

3.1 First Question of Research: Strengths of Online Assessment

- 1) Using internet in evaluation process causes to achieving and categorizing information and data rapidly and facilitating the calculations.
- 2) Using computer causes to minimizing the rate of possible errors and mistakes which may occur in calculations.
- 3) Saving the costs resulted from the conventional evaluations such as costs related to the typing, coping, distributing, and gathering the forms.
- 4) Free to select the time and the place to answer to the questionnaires is considered as another advantage to which all the groups pointed. They believed that they aren't obliged to complete the forms hastily and in a short time in internet evaluation. They can connect to the internet from their house, read carefully the questions and considering all aspects, complete the forms in peace of mind. Indeed, lack of any limitations in terms of time in responding the questions leads to complete the form in peace. This leads students to complete the questionnaires in good faith. All groups were unanimous in interviews.
- 5) Eighty percent of participants that there always has been this fear in conventional evaluation to be recognized by the professor through the handwriting and the grades to be affected. But in internet evaluation, there is no concern, because the answers are type and there is no possible to be recognized by the professors. A student told: The questionnaires are not faithfully completed in conventional evaluation, because of fear to be recognized by the relevant professor.
- 6) Fifty percent of students believed that no time is wasted in the class by internet evaluation. Also, the students are not influenced by the classmates and their professors, because in internet evaluation, the students complete the forms without the present of professor and classmates and by themselves through personal computers.
- 7) Finally, all the students (%100), believed that they enjoys internet evaluation more than conventional one and it is more interesting.

3.2 Question II: Weaknesses of Online Evaluation

- 1) Concerning the disadvantages of the internet evaluation, more than eighty percent of the students expressed that it is possible to recognize the students' passwords which were entered in order to log on. In this regard, one of female students told: "recognizing the students is the biggest problem in this process. We are sure that the personnel of the university can recognize the students easily. So, we select the items very excellent and excellent, and in fact the evaluation is unrealistic." Another student says that "the fact that the students enter the site and fill out the forms is a good idea and it is considered as the validity and importance of the evaluation, but it is better to remove the obligations and find a way the students not to fear being recognized."
- 2) The other problem which was addressed by thirty percent of the students is that all the students cannot access the internet and site from any places easily and they may face the coincidence of this type of evaluation and selecting the units or frequent disconnections and low speed connection that these problems result in preoccupation for the student.
- 3) Approximately all the groups indicated that the internet evaluation forms are missing open-ended questions and there are issues about which students wish to discuss.
- 4) All the groups believed that disadvantage of this process is that the system doesn't operate intelligently, and being not familiar with the system may produce problems for the students or impatient students may mark some items and log out the system. The events result in evaluations not has the necessary validity. For example, a student said that "when I answered the first question, a message popped up and I click yes, all of a sudden the form was closed and it was when I answered only one question."

In addition to the above disadvantages, some of the students put forward some problems which can be considered as the disadvantages of both internet and conventional evaluations by students. These problems are related to the tools and trends of evaluation as follows:

-Most of the students in science believe that there are some ambiguities in these questions, for example, some questions need to be explained and cleared. In this regard, one of students told: "Each course and each professor varies from the other and posing the same questions for all professors and about courses is not proper."

-The other issue is that the evaluations are not performed honestly and have no feedbacks. A student said: " these evaluations have no result and effect, because we observe the professor who is criticized and protested and has the lowest scores in evaluations is given the curriculum for the new semester.

3.3 Third Question of Research

In response to this question "which method of evaluation, internet or conventional, do the students prefer?", it said that in spite of the disadvantages put forward by the groups, the students prefer to use the internet evaluation method to assess the professors, because using computer and internet is more interesting and has more advantages. They believe that the disadvantages can be improved.

3.4 Fourth Question of Research

Suggestions for better performance of online evaluation

To solve the problems encountered during using the internet, to improve and to perform better evaluations, the following points are recommended by the participants:

- 1) Informing the students properly in the campus and at the university level and describing the advantages of internet evaluation by authorities responsible for evaluating the professors, because this method is innovative and new and the students have no information about its advantages and application.
- 2) Creating web pages more interesting: so the students are promoted to complete the forms and at the end of the process, the software thanks the participants in a pretty way.
- 3) Teaching the students how to fill out the forms and to perform the evaluation: because the students haven't enough information about how to enter the network and complete the forms.
- 4) Adding descriptive questions at the end of the forms: So the students can type their viewpoints and ideas. The system must be programmed so that the user can save and print all the written questions.
- 5) Assuring the students that all their ideas are paid attention to and an environment would be provided, where the students will observe the feedback of the evaluations in practice, such as sending e-mails and announcing the comparative scores of evaluating the professors. Giving the feedback to students makes them showing more commitments in completing the forms properly. Of the advantages of this method is that the students can choose freely a course taught by two professors, because the students know the scores of the evaluation related to both professors. This is the case when the whole information is offered about a professor rather than informing the students of scores in details.
- 6) Making the forms and items more intelligent: so that the students are obligated to answer all items. Presently, the forms are so that the students can log out by answering even an item. Making the forms intelligent has this advantage that the students must answer to all the items in order to be able to log out. This makes the evaluations more valid and more exact information to be gathered.
- 7) Assigning the evaluation time: this helps the students complete the forms without concerns about the exams and selection of units. In this regard, it is recommended to perform the evaluations at 12th to 16th week (for a month) of semester in order not to coincide with the time of selecting units or taking exams. During this time, the students are promoted to perform the evaluation.
- 8) Motivating the students and enhancing their information about this field by:
 - Feasibility meetings for students;
 - The use of brochures, posters monitor with special effects;
 - Explain teachers in the classroom about the benefits of this way.
 - using positive processes such as encouraging, internet messages, giving feedback, providing some advantages for students and reminding frequently the students during the fixed time for evaluating.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of the present study was recognizing the weaknesses and strength of online evolution of faculty members teaching by students that doing in the University of Isfahan. Evaluation of faculty members teaching is a device for recognition of their ability in teaching, assessing, the student's learning and it can improve efficiency of faculty members in teaching. In terms of growth of computer's technologies improvement of universities and its effect on achievement and information processing, it is necessary to use this technologies. The results of the study are consistent with relevant studies in Iranian and foreign universities.

For example Kronholm et al (1999) compared the costs of gathering faculty evaluation online with those of

gathering the evolution in-class. They concluded that the in-class version of survey has larger cost than the online version.

Robertson (2005) in his study examined two methods of faculty evaluation. Problem addressed in comparing a paper-based system with an online evaluation process were raising costs, difference in instructor scores and return rates, and attitudes of students and faculty members. Results indicated that in spite of low student response rates mean instructor scores were not negatively biased. The cost analysis of survey methodologies has provided evidence that the online evaluation can save colleges thousands of dollars annually.

In another research, Simpson (2000) showed that the online evaluation is less susceptible to faculty influence than the in-class evaluation. In the typical in-class evaluation, it is possible that the faculty member might perform on the day of the evaluations some activity that is designed to elicit a favorable response from students, e.g. have a pizza party, plan an entertaining, educational game, announce that the workload requirements have been reduced or announce that there is now away that students may earn extra credit.

The results of two researches showed advantages of the online method that it can permit professors greater flexibility in the design of the survey instrument (Ku (2003), Ha and Marsh (1998). Also with online method, students have multiple days on which to provide their evaluation. And since students are not constrained by time during an online response session, they can provide as complete a response to the gestations as they wish.

During a poll of students who have used both the online and traditional methods of evaluation reveal the most students preferred the online methods of evaluation revealed that most students preferred the online method of evaluation and had little difficulty accessing and using the online system. However the principal problem with online evaluations is a potentially low response rate.

Dummeyer et al (2004) compared student evaluations of faculty teaching that were completed in-class with those collected online. They were found that the response rate to the online survey was generally lower than that to the in-class survey. When a grade incentive was used encourage response to the online survey, a response rate was achieved that was comparable with that to the in-class survey. Additionally, the study found that online evaluation does not produce significantly different mean evaluation scores than traditional in-class evaluation.

Nulty (2008) in his essay told the most prevalent methods for boosting online survey response rates are:

- 1) Repeat reminder emails to non-respondents (students)
- 2) Repeat reminder emails to survey owners (academics)
- 3) Incentives to students in the form of prizes for respondents awarded through a lottery.

Lizzio and Wilson (2008) believe that the evaluation feedback to students through student's e-mail, makes students feels comfortable and so it cause that they companies with more knowledge in evaluation.

Although evaluating and improving the quality of teaching in high education has been considered in recent decades and most of universities have engaged in creating a quality system, but the evaluation system has not designed systematically. The results from the present study showed that the new technology can be used in the structured and automatic evaluation system. Also, Layne (1999) confirmed it in their researches. So considering the several advantages accounted for the Online evaluation method such as stability of the evaluation method, reduction in financial and personnel costs, saving and processing the data easily, nonintervention of professor and in-class activities in the evaluation, the method can be used in the high education system and its various advantages can be used to improve the teaching quality of faculty members. According to the findings and results from various researches about this field of study and from the present study, and considering the importance of the online evaluation by the students in high education system for evaluating the teaching quality of faculty members, and the positive and visible effects of this method in formulating an evaluation system and improving the quality of teaching in the universities, the online evaluation method deserves to be paid attention in order to reduce the financial and personnel costs.

So, to prevent low response rates to online evaluation, faculty may need to utilize techniques that with motivate students to participate in an online evaluation.

References

- Barkhi, R. & Williams, P. (2010). The impact of electronic media on faculty evaluation. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher education*, 35(2), 241-262.
- Couper, M. (2000). Web surveys: A review of issues and approaches. *Public Opinion Quarterly- Oxford University Press*, 64(4): 464-94.

- Dommeyer, C. J., Baum, D., Chapman, K. S. & Hanna, R. (2002). Attitudes of business faculty toward two methods of collecting teacher evaluations: Paper vs. online. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, Vol. 27, No. 5. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0260293022000009320>
- Dommeyer, C.J. Baum, D. Hanna, R. w. & Chapman, K.S. (2004). Gathering faculty teaching evaluations by in-class and online surveys: their effects on response rates and evaluations. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*. 29(5), 611-623. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02602930410001689171>
- Giles, A., Martin, C., Bryce, D., & Hendry, G. (2004). Student as partners in evaluation: Student and teacher perspectives. University of Sydney, Australia. *Assessment & Evolution in Higher Education*. 29(6), 681-685. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0260293042000227227>
- Ha, T. S., Marsh, J., & Jones, J. (1998). Using the web for student evaluation of teaching *paper presented at the quality in teaching and learning conference*, Hong Kong, December.
- Henderson, T. (2001). September/October. Classroom assessment techniques in asynchronous learning networks. The Technology Source. [Online] Available: <http://ts.mivu.org/default.asp?show=article&id=1034>. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02602930902795927>.
- Kronholm, E. A., Wisher, R. A., Curnow, C. K. & Poker, F. (1999). The transformation of a distance learning enterprise to an internet base: From advertising to evaluation. *Paper presented at the Northern Arizona University NAU/Web99 Conference*. Flagstaff, AZ.
- Ku, S. (2002/2003). Marshall online teaching evaluation system. Faculty forum, 4(1). [Online] Available: http://www.usc.edu/academe/acsen/resources/newsletter/0203v4n1/0203v4n1_article06.shtml.
- Layne, B. H., DeCristoforo, J. R. & McGinty, D. (1999). Electronic versus traditional student ratings of instruction. *Research in Higher Education*. 40(2), 221-232.
- Lizzio, A., & Wilson, K. (2008). Feedback on assessment: Student's perceptions of quality & effectiveness. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*. 33(3), 263-275.
- Nulty, D. D. (2008). The adequacy of response rates to online & paper surveys: What can be done? *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*. 33(3), 301-314. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02602930701293231>.
- Pounder, J. S. (2008). Transformational classroom leadership: A novel approach to evaluation classroom performance. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*. 33(3), 233-243. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02602930701292621>
- Robertson, J. P. (2005). Online versus in-class faculty evaluation: Does mode really matter? *Dissertation Submitted for Doctor of Philosophy*, Walden University.
- Seif, A. (1997). Teacher evaluation using students' view point. Is it reliable? *Psychol Res*. 1, 12-24.
- Shakourinia, A., Motlagh, M. A., Malayeri, A., JahanMard, A., & Kamali Sani, H. (2005). The view of Jondishapour Medical university student about faculty evaluation. *Iranian j Med Edu*. 5, 109-117.
- Simpson, P. M. and Siguaw, J.A. (2000). Student evaluation of teaching: An exploratory study of the faculty response. *Journal of Marketing Evaluation*, 22(3), 199-213. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0273475300223004>
- Timpson, W., & Andrew, D. (1997). "Rethinking Student Evaluation & the Improvement of Teaching: Instruments for change at the university of Queensland." *Studies in Higher Education*. 22(1). <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03075079712331381131>