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Student Evaluation of Teaching: An Effective Model

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Abstract

Systematic gathering of Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET) is an improvement tool and a performance measure in higher education. SET contributes to improving the quality of teaching. The Faculty of Medicine, University of Ruhuna, established a system to obtain SET at the departmental level to identify measures to improve teaching/learning activities. Further, the Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) monitors the process of obtaining SET and the remedial measures taken. During the year 2020, 91% of the academics in the faculty, across 15 departments, obtained SET. They identified the measures that need to be taken to improve teaching based on SET in the context of their departments. All the departments reported the progress and the measures they would take to rectify the gaps and improve teaching, to the IQAC.

Keywords: Students, Medical, Feedback, Teaching, Model

Introduction

Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET) is a popular core practice in higher education that needs to be well-established. In the past, systematic SET had been used for the sole purpose of offering a developmental perspective to the teachers to improve the quality of their teaching. Recently, it has become a useful tool adopted by universities all over the world for quality assurance and evaluation purposes as well (Marsh 2007; Kwan, 1999).

According to Richardson (2005), SET is defined as the use of a formal process to collect information from the students about their perceptions of teacher practices, teacher effectiveness, and the quality of educational programmes. According to Mohanna (2018), SET is not the same as “appraisal”, where the teacher discusses the learning progress with the students or “assessment”, where the teacher measures what the students have learnt. The four main uses of obtaining SET, according to Marsh and Dunkin (1992), are to provide feedback to teachers on their practices, measure teacher effectiveness for administrative purposes, provide information for prospective students in course selection, and as data for research on teaching.

The Faculty of Medicine, University of Ruhuna, established a system to obtain SET at the departmental level and monitor the process centrally, through the IQAC. Although obtaining SET has been practiced in the faculty at the departmental level, the process has not been centralized and monitored before 2020. IQAC has recognized that SET has not been conducted regularly and effectively across the departments. In some departments even though SET was conducted, analysis has not been done due to constraints in the human resources. There was no mechanism to ensure whether any measures were taken to rectify the gaps identified through SET. Therefore, IQAC took a step forward to centralize and streamline the SET process. The aim of this concept paper is to describe the process of obtaining and monitoring SET developed for the Faculty of Medicine, University of Ruhuna as a good practice in quality assurance.

Methodology

A workshop for non-academic staff members was conducted to train them in obtaining online feedback. At least one non-academic member from each department participated in the workshop. They acquired skills in taking a copy from the original Google form, individualizing the form for a given session, acquisition of responses, extracting necessary information and preparing the report on students' feedback. All the academics of the 15 departments in the faculty were encouraged to conduct one SET per year. They were given the option to conduct either through hard copies or Google forms. Obtaining SET was done at the department level. In 2020, the progress of obtaining SET was assessed at mid and end of the year by IQAC.

The SET used in the faculty was developed by the Medical Education and Staff Development Unit of the Faculty of Medicine. It consists of ten 5-Likert scale questions and two open-ended questions which focus on the introduction, objectives, and summary of the lecture; audibility and speed of the lecture; whether the concepts were explained clearly; whether the teacher is prepared for the lecture; clarity of the slides/graphs/diagrams; overall quality of the lecture, and whether the student can apply what was learnt during the session. The two open-ended questions are for students to indicate good points regarding the session and suggestions for improvements.

Due to restrictions implied during the Covid-19 pandemic, virtual teaching was introduced and was the main mode of delivering lectures. IQAC found that the tool used for physical teaching sessions would not address comprehensively to improve the teaching conducted via the virtual platform. Therefore, a questionnaire was developed to obtain feedback for virtual teaching which was approved at the IQAC meeting.

The questionnaire for virtual teaching consists of twelve 5-Likert scaled questions and two open-ended questions. The questionnaire is the same as the one on in-hall lectures with two additional questions on the technical issues encountered and about the lecturer paying attention to the chat box messages. Both questionnaires were made available on the IQAC website to be downloaded, and Google forms of the questionnaires were shared with the Gmail account of the Heads of the Departments. The IQAC monitored obtaining SET by the departments and followed up the measures proposed by the departments to improve their teaching based on responses received for the SET.

Progress of Obtaining SET in 2020

There were 97 academics in the faculty in 2020. Eight academic staff members were on leave. At the end of the first six months of the year, 57/89 (64%) obtained SET. By the end of the year, obtaining SET reached 91%.

Some of the main actions taken by the departments to improve teaching based on SET include, improving the use of the Learning Management System, discussing feedback given by the students in department meetings, improving the quality of tools used in teaching (PowerPoint presentations, video materials, hand-outs), discussing questions and answers at the end of the lecture, and improving the quality of technical aspects during virtual sessions.

Discussion

All 15 departments of the faculty conducted SET during the year 2020. Based on the feedback received, individual departments identified and implemented the measures to improve teaching-learning activities. As suggested by many studies conducted worldwide, obtaining SET has led to improved teaching performances due to it being a platform where teachers could identify the deficiencies in their teaching methods (Wilson, 1986; Arubayi, 1987; Divoky and Rothermel, 1989; Theall and Franklin, 1991; Marsh and Roche, 1993). It was highlighted in a study conducted by Harvey (2011) that SET becomes an effective tool only when the stakeholders consider the process seriously and plan appropriate actions according to student feedback. Therefore, the results indicated that centralizing the SET process by the IQAC has ensured that the feedback received from the students are being used effectively by the lecturers to improve the teaching/learning activities.

The results showed a positive trend in the faculty attempting to improve their teaching practices with 91% of the academics conducting SET in 2020. Literature suggests that one reason behind teachers being reluctant to conduct SET is because they believe the practice of giving students a voice regarding teaching practices could undermine the teacher's authority (Flutter, 2007). The faculty has

proven, with the high rate of obtaining SET, the willingness of the lecturers to absorb the students' voice into the process of improving their teaching activities.

Although in the past, SET was obtained, there was no clear evidence available with the IQAC of the actions taken based on the feedback. Further, the responses received for SET obtained by the departments were not analysed centrally. The IQAC took the initiative to centralize the monitoring of the SET process which is carried out at the departmental level. A study conducted by Wong and Moni (2014) to examine clinical teachers' perception of the SET process revealed that most of the teachers perceive SET to be a part of a quality assurance process. Further, the literature highlights the importance of a central authority implementing the SET, where SET is a core element in university internal management systems to fulfil quality assurance purposes (Anderson 2006; Marsh 2007; Shah and Nair 2012). With the centralization, IQAC encourages the departments to identify the lapses in their teaching and report the actions taken to improve teaching/learning activities. It was a good exercise for the departments to think of the measures within their context. Further, the process leads to the conduct of SET throughout the year evenly and prevents excessive and frequent feedback from students to minimize student exhaustion leading to poor response rates and unreliable feedback.

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