

A Case Study of Problems in Evaluation in Jimma University in General and Business Faculty in Particular

Shimels Zewdie*

Introduction

In the teaching-learning process instructors evaluate students by using certain tools. It is clearly known that the purpose of learning at all levels is to change the behavior of students and help them to think critically. So after teaching a proper evaluation procedure will help:

- to measure how much students understand the subject
- to motivate students to work hard
- as supportive of good teaching
- to provide hint to students about their level of performance
- to give feedback for the teachers.

Regardless of the above and other advantages, the inability of instructors to follow good evaluation method can have negative effects. In this case study, I want to identify some of the problems in evaluating students at Jimma University as a whole and particularly in the Business Faculty. There is no research outcome that can be used as a base to identify these problems. The study is based on:

- My observation of the evaluation process followed by my colleagues and I as an instructor for the last two years.
- The information and complaints about evaluation process from students and staff members.

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Problems Observed

It may be difficult to list all possible problems that can be faced related to evaluation. However, the following are identified as the major ones.

- Absence of continuous evaluation
- Bias in evaluation by instructors on the basis of:
 - the group they teach
 - sex
 - religion
 - race and others
- Inadequate planning
- Absence of feedback
- Not to provide the weight of questions on the examination papers
- Absence of validity and reliability

Problem Discussion

Absence of continuous assessment

Frequent assessment of performance will help students in different aspects and also help the instructor to identify the potential of his students rather than determining their fate by a single or two assessments. Some of these advantages include:

- fear of failure of students by a single test will be avoided
- students who performed low in one test may be encouraged to work hard in the following assessment
- it will help students to study the course throughout the semester rather than only putting maximum effort at the end.

- by using different assessment tools we can help students to identify their potential.

With all these benefits, continuous assessment is hardly practiced in most higher education institutions including ours. This is mainly due to the following factors. Nowadays the number of students assigned to each higher education institution is significantly increasing. As facilities like classroom are limited in number the general trend is to accommodate a large number of students in each class. The problem of large class size is also accompanied by inadequate number of instructors.

Particularly in our faculty as the instructors are very few, they are forced to handle more than one course in a semester and different courses each semester. Most of them say, with this large workload, it is difficult to assess the performance of this large class size continuously. So, in most cases one mid-term and one final examination in a semester are used to evaluate students.

Bias of Instructors

The instructor, as a common facilitator to all, is expected to evaluate students equally and fairly. But sometimes, students have a complaint about some instructors being biased. These complaints include:

- When the same course is taught by more than one instructor the practice in our university in setting the tool, weight assignment, and determining of the scale, is done by all instructors teaching that specific course. But each instructor evaluates the performance of his students only. So some instructors are observed as becoming lenient in evaluating the performance of their group (especially in subjective questions).

The major reasons for these may be:

- Fear of evaluation result given to them by students
- They think the better the grade of students, the better the teaching quality;
- Most often some instructors are accused of being biased to either of the sex positively or negatively. This may be on the basis of either the conflict or good relationship they have with opposite sex;
- It is also not uncommon to complain about instructors being biased in their evaluation on the basis of religion or race.

Inadequate Planning

It is the practice of the majority of instructors to set their evaluation tools a few days before the test. This is mainly because instructors feel that it is the easiest task to set tests for the course they teach. But as the remaining time is very much limited they may not have enough time to critically consider and review the content, coverage, and even the type of tests for their students. So mostly the final tool of evaluation remains their first draft.

Absence of Feedback

After assessing the performance of students, showing of their result will encourage them to perform more. In our faculty some instructors were not able to give feedback to students (especially on essay questions). They attributed this to work load, large class size, and short time gap between mid term exam and final semester examination.

In most cases in our faculty instructors do not give the weight of each question on question papers. This omission makes the students to go through the question papers sequentially and they may even give less attention to the questions with high weight and vice versa.

Lack of validity and reliability

Validity

Practically, the evaluation tools are expected to evaluate important skills and abilities.

Rarely some instructors set evaluation tools that cannot really measure the required skills and abilities. This is practiced mostly when the instructors include detailed items in their tests to make their questions more difficult, or when they ask some minor elements to set easy questions. As to me, mostly instructors will use this kind of tools when they want to show their subject is more important and difficult, and when they want most of their students to secure good marks. This kind of questions cannot actually assess the abilities of students regarding a specific subject.

Reliability

The tests administered to evaluate students are required to be as much accurate as possible. Even though it is difficult to make evaluations perfectly reliable, the instructor has to reduce the error and make the point of students nearer to their actual score.

The lack of reliability in evaluation in our university is observed in the following ways:

- Even if this practice is less frequent in our faculty, in most other faculties students apply for re-grading. After they submit their application the result of most of the students is upgraded. Here my intention is not to deny the possibility of

mistakes in evaluation. But the percentage of students upgraded by re-evaluation is very high. This may show the evaluation of the instructor was not reliable previously. In some cases it has become a common practice for students to approach instructors when their general performance is poor and they are likely to be dismissed as a result.

- When two different instructors evaluate the same question paper the results may differ. This can be taken as a symptom for lack of reliability in evaluation.

Recommendations

Even if it is difficult for me to give exhaustive recommendations for the problems observed, the following points could contribute to minimize the problems observed.

Provision of continuous assessment for students by using different tools

The instructor can use a student-centered approach in teaching by giving reading assignments and encouraging group presentation. Here students handle the major task. So the instructor will save his time in lecturing while at the same time this can help as a tool to assess student performance. Behind this practice, instructors should give tests at the end of each chapter to encourage their students to work hard throughout the semester.

Bias of instructors

If each instructor does not act professionally it is difficult to avoid his mental bias. To minimize this problem the university has to have a test center in each faculty. Here, specific subject instructors will prepare their tool and present this evaluation tool with the answer key to the center. Then the question papers are duplicated in the center and distributed to students through invigilators. After the answer

sheets are collected, the test center will give codes to answer sheets and distribute to the teachers teaching the course for evaluation. So as the name of the student is not on the question paper it will reduce the bias of individual instructor. Behind this test center instructors training about evaluation may help in changing their attitude.

Inadequate planning

In order to follow the practice of adequate planning, instructors have a proper training in test preparation. This training will help them:

- to avoid their misconception of considering test preparation as a simple task.
- to relate their instructional objectives, their teaching strategy, textual material, and evaluation procedure through adequate planning.

Until this training is provided to all instructors, test centers must require instructors to set their draft examination (especially at the end of semester examination) at the beginning of the semester, tell them to revise it continuously and submit it to the center.

In addition, provision of staff seminar, creating friendly atmosphere for colleagues' assistance, and distribution of reading materials about testing will contribute for instructors to follow adequate planning in test preparation.

Absence of feedback

The provision of feedback along with the opportunity to improve evaluation tools should be a major task of the instructor. This practice will show students their level of performance, motivate them to improve their work, and it can also foster better learning. In the existing large class size situation instructors may consider the

provision of feedback as a difficult task. But they can undertake the practice of giving feedback through the following method:

- Posting of answers for tests
- Use some important references that can give answers for questions
- Help students to check their answers
- Select some papers from the total and identify common problems. Then
- Discuss these common problems and give answers
- Select good performers to look at the paper of others
- Exchange of papers between students for evaluation
- Set tools, which are easy to correct immediately, like that of multiple choice, true false and matching.

Weight of each question

The practice of not giving weight on question papers has to be discouraged. This may be done mostly because the instructors think of themselves as the only decision-makers related to their course and maneuver the results of their students. But the student has to be clear about the weight of questions in the question paper and budget his time accordingly. So instructors must provide the weight of each question in setting their exam paper.

Absence of validity and reliability

Validity

In order to increase the validity of tests the following can be taken as measures:

- advising and training of instructors for validity;
- two-way grid can help instructors to prepare tests consistent with their instructional objective;
- item classification (taxonomy of educational objective) will also help improve test validity.

Reliability

To be sure the marking is reliable and to minimize errors through assessment process some of the ways are:

- Choosing assessment methods, which are less likely to lead to errors. These methods include multiple choices, short answer questions for which specific mark can be assigned.
- Breakdown the total mark assigned to single question into different parts to make it more reliable. It will help to reduce the degree of making mistakes in giving marks for specific questions. This is true mostly in subjective type questions.

Conclusion

The problem identified has a significant effect in evaluation tools and the result of students. But as the identification of the problems is simply based on personal observation there must be research to support this observation.

To implement the possible recommendations the university must arrange pedagogical training for instructors, establish the test center in the faculties, and hire instructors to alleviate the main problem of large class size. The Ministry of Education also has to put effort in fulfilling classrooms and required teaching aids.

Among all, to follow good evaluation procedure there must be a change of attitude of instructors. The change of attitude will help them to identify the wrong methods and procedures followed. This could help instructors to correct their errors to facilitate the creation of good teaching-learning environment.