

COURSE, TEACHER AND TUTORIALS RATINGS: WHAT STUDENTS HAVE TO SAY?

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ABSTRACT

The study hypothesises that with increased or better ratings or scores on course, teacher and tutorial characteristics, the students' performance is assumed to be better. Students learn more in an environment where these abovementioned characteristics are graded better on a scale by students. Based on the statistical analysis, the findings point out a low agreement of students towards course and tutorial characteristics while the majority of students are in high agreement of teacher characteristics are just right. There are no such differences in opinions between master and bachelor programme about course, teacher and tutorial characteristics. Study finds a strong association between overall performance of teacher and teacher characteristics but course and tutorial characteristics are not significantly affecting the overall performance of the teacher. However, this relationship is weaker when compared to teacher characteristics but still, course and tutorial characteristics are positively associated with the overall performance of the teacher.

Keywords: *Course characteristics; teacher characteristics; tutorial; evaluation*

1. INTRODUCTION

The student evaluation procedure has gone through a drastic change all over the world, even in India, this change can be seen as the universities are adopting the semester system to enhance value to the students. The changing scenario has provided increased opportunity to students as it assesses or evaluates student's performance on the basis of continuous learning, assessment and feedback processes. However, the system of semester evaluation has many drawbacks e.g. inadequacy of time, reduced frequency of co-curricular activities, and the most important one is increasing the load of work on both the student and the faculty.

With the privatisation of education and increased number of private universities, this burden has increased many folds and led to the evaluation of not only the students but also the course structure, the faculty and how the tutorials are handled. Universities are making the faculty responsible for the learning outcome of their students. In this sequence, students are to evaluate their faculties and grade them (Germain and Scandura, 2005). The importance of evaluation of the course and faculty effectiveness in the higher education system has increased over the years (Wagner, 1999). This approach of evaluating course and faculty characteristics through students' ratings or perception has been in existence from the beginning of the 20th century (Wachtel, 1998) and has been extensively used in studies like Feldman (1997), Jirovecet al. (1998), Wachtel (1998), and Linse (2017).

Here a question arises that whether students are appropriate stakeholders to evaluate course and faculty characteristics or not. Arreola (1995) and Peterson (1995) are of the opinion that students are most convenient samples to evaluate teaching-learning process and they closely observe each and every faculty and know how the other students think about the course and

faculty characteristics. Other than that, they provide feedback to faculty and evaluate course structure to facilitate administrative decisions regarding faculty increment and promotion (Centra 19993; Cohen 1980; Marsh and Roche 1993).

Particularly if we talk about course structure, it is very important to revisit the course content and the level of complexity. The time constraint makes it very important to have reliable and validated course contents which serve best to the current market needs. Studies (Marsh 1980; Chang 2000) found course difficulty is the most important variable explaining students' ratings of instruction. It was also found that course difficulty was negatively related to students' rating. On the other hand, Rindermann and Schofield (2001) opined students' perception of the reliability of courses is less consistent and course effectiveness is not all about faculty competency.

Studies found that higher ratings of students to course characteristics are associated with high-level courses and this might be associated with or due to higher learning interest of students (Chang 1997; Marsh 1987). The students' feedback to the course and faculty characteristics is made mandatory in many foreign and Indian universities and this has led faculty to facilitate students in a better way and decrease course workload (Greenwald and Gillmore, 1998). On the other hand, Marsh (1980) and Franklin *et al.* (1991) found a positive association between course difficulty and better students' ratings.

Nowadays we see many universities and colleges are having feedbacks from their students on teaching activities to evaluate their faculty's performance on different parameters. The quality of lectures and faculties is being evaluated by the observation/feedback of students after the commencement of session and before the semester examinations (Theall and Franklin 2001; Mukherji and Rustagi 2008). Student's performance and learning outcome depend much on the faculty's characteristics. For example, whether the faculty makes teaching stimulating and interesting or not, manages to the students' level of understanding or not, emphasizes students' participation in learning or not etc. mean a lot to students and influences significantly the students' performance. Other than this punctuality to the classes, sense of responsibility, respect for students, warm and friendly behaviour also significantly influence the learning outcomes of students (Magno and Sembrano 2008; Hattie 2009). The most important variable which affects faculty grading was found to be how faculty encourages student's enthusiasm to learn (Chang, 2000).

As this semester system suffers from the inadequacy of time, putting extra classes becomes very difficult for weaker students. This adversely affects the functioning of tutorials which are meant to enhance the discussions and student's participation in particular topics covered in tutorials. The time constraints make tutorials purpose vague and it becomes like any other common lecture. Even the faculty performance is measured through the conduct of tutorials as it involves students' interaction and discussion in the learning process (Rindermann and Schofield, 2001). This article is about the accurate interpretation of student ratings data and the appropriate use of that data to evaluate course, teacher and tutorials characteristics. Its aim is to make recommendations for use and interpretation based on students' ratings data to guide personnel decisions and it is critical that administrators and teachers have enough data to evaluate the course, teacher and tutorial characteristics in context of Indian higher education institutions except studies like Mittal and Gera (2013), Hussain and Khan (2016) and Lata *et al.* (2008). The study fills research gap by introducing research based on students' ratings in Indian context. The article begins with an overview of common views and review of literature, followed by objectives in section 2. Further the methodology is defined in section 3, followed by data analysis and conclusion in section 4 and 5 respectively.

2. Objectives and hypotheses of the study

- a) To evaluate scores based on course, teacher and tutorial characteristics assessed by the respondents (students).
- b) To evaluate the teacher's performance parameters based on students' perceptions.
- c) To evaluate the usefulness of tutorials for students.

The study hypothesises that with increased or better ratings or scores on course, teacher and tutorial characteristics, the students' performance is assumed to be better. Students learn more in an environment where these abovementioned characteristics are graded better on a scale by

students. The study tries to evaluate how other stakeholders and parts of the higher education system are serving for the betterment of teaching-learning process based on the perception of students (the main stakeholder). The study is all more necessary because it is concerned with Indian scenario where students' welfare has to be taken care by all private and government institutions and very few literatures is available for policy makers.

3. Methodology

The primary concern of the study is to measure the course, teacher and tutorial characteristics based on the perception of students in higher education. The sample of the study is taken from the undergraduate and postgraduate students covering two private universities of India (names of the universities have not been mentioned as ethics do not allow for this). The data is drawn from a structured questionnaire and collected using Google document form which was circulated via emails and other electronic and communication mediums. The courses under considerations were mainly of three and four credits, where four credits are particularly focusing on tutorials (three hours of lecture and one hour of the tutorial in a week). The sample size of the study is 70 and a cross section of year 2018. In this phase of the study, our sample consists only private university students because these universities have emphasized much on students' welfare from the quality point of view. The study has a limiting fact that it does not consider government universities but the findings of the study can be generalised as both are under the ambit of the higher education system.

To measure the course, teacher and tutorials characteristics the study uses a five-point ordinal scale ranging from "Strong disagree" to "Strongly agree." The overall score was measured by summing up all scores where a score of "1" is given to complete disagreement and "5" is given to complete agreement. Course, teacher and tutorial characteristics were measured using six (6), twelve (12) and six (6) items respectively in the evaluation sheet (see appendix). The course characteristics scores can range from 6 to 30 for each observation or sample and then these scores have been classified in a low and high level of agreement using the count of scores. The study used the same method for the other two characteristics viz. teacher and tutorial which can range from 12 to 60 and 6 to 30 respectively. High level of agreement has been given in case of course and tutorial characteristics individual sum is above 22 and in the case of teacher characteristics, this sum should be more than 41. Teacher's overall performance has been measured using question 11 and 17 only.

4. Data analysis

The study consists of total sample size of 70, out of which 44 are female and 26 are male students. The age wise distribution shows that among female 36.4 percent sample and among male 61.5 percent sample is in the age group of 19-21, while 63.6 percent of female and 38.5 percent of the male sample are in the age group of 22-24. Regarding the course of the students, 65.5 percent of the students are from master programs and rest 34.3 percent are from the bachelor program. Most of the sample (54.3 percent) is in the final year of the masters followed by 25.7 percent sample from the final year of bachelors. Eight (11.4 percent) and six (8.6 percent) respondents have been taken from master previous year and bachelors the second year respectively.

4.1 Course characteristics

The course characteristics have been measured using six questions (see appendix). Starting from the first one that "The course content is just right," responses shows that majority is in agreement of this statement and only 11.5 percent are in disagreement (disagree or completely disagree). However, the second statement "The level of complexity (hard) is just right" shows increased disagreement of 20.0 percent. As far as course content suitability is concerned, 25.7 percent sample is in disagreement with the statement that course content is complementing the industry demands. The evidenced-based nature of courses, degree of reliability, validity, and synchronisation of topics within the courses are found to be in accordance with the high agreement.

Course characterises based on scores shows that female students are in low agreement towards course characteristics (81.8 percent), while this percentage for male students is only 53.8 percent. Results from chi-square analysis show that there is a significant

difference in the course characteristics by gender ($\chi^2 = 7.1671, p < 0.05$) and female students find course characteristics are not in accordance to their expectations. In terms of program, master students are in low agreement towards course characteristics while the bachelors are comparatively in high agreement (41.67 percent) towards course characteristics, but this difference of opinion is not significant ($\chi^2 = 4.0028, p > 0.05$).

4.2 Teacher characteristics

The teacher characteristics are measured using 10 questions based on student perception and scores have been assigned to every observation. Clear explanation of sessions plans before commencement and summary of important aspects of teaching are in accordance with the high agreement. Other than this faculty's punctuality to the classes is also supported by high agreement (disagreement level of 5.7 percent only). The reason behind the better functioning of these aspects is due to centralised vigilance, as the central administration keep stressing on the betterment of abovementioned aspects which is seen mostly in private universities where student welfare is of utmost priority.

On the other hand, as inherent characteristics of a faculty is concerned, the study shows an increased and high level of disagreement on aspects like respect to students (31.4 percent), feedbacks on tests/assignment (22.9), emphasizing student's participation in learning (17.1 percent), making teaching stimulating and interesting (14.3 percent) and delivery of lecture easily understandable (14.3 percent). With increased work burden and pressure of student's feedback, faculties in private universities are well prepared before every class, try to manage the learning activities to the level of understanding of the students, use current examples and illustrations in the learning process and show concerns and demonstrate responsibility towards students. All these aspects were mostly in accordance with the high level of agreement.

Teacher characteristics based on scores shows that the majority of female and male students are in high agreement towards teacher characteristics (more than 50.0 percent for both genders). Results from chi-square analysis show that there is no significant difference in the teacher characteristics by gender ($\chi^2 = 0.3092, p > 0.05$) and both genders find teacher characteristics are in accordance to their expectations with some issues mentioned above in analysis. In terms of program, 47.8 percent of master students are in low agreement towards teacher characteristics while 41.7 percent bachelors are in low agreement towards teacher characteristics, but this difference of opinion is not significant ($\chi^2 = 0.9544, p > 0.05$).

4.3 Tutorial characteristics

The study reveals that the most disappointing aspect is related to the conduct of tutorials. In general, a high level of disagreement can be seen in every front of tutorial management. The student's grade tutorials with low compliments in terms of tutorials are conducted regularly (disagreement level of 28.6 percent), topics chosen mutually by the tutor and students for the tutorial (28.6 percent) and the level of topics covered in tutorials are just right (25.8 percent). Even the topics covered in tutorials and its matching with main course content is in a high level of disagreement which makes its purpose vague.

Tutorial characteristics based on overall scores shows that female students are in low agreement towards tutorial characteristics (72.7 percent), while this percentage for male students is only 53.8 percent. Results from chi-square analysis show that there is no significant difference in the tutorial characteristics by gender ($\chi^2 = 2.6158, p > 0.05$). In terms of program, master students are in low agreement towards tutorial characteristics while the bachelors are comparatively in high agreement (41.7 percent) towards tutorial characteristics and this difference of opinion is also not significant ($\chi^2 = 0.9141, p > 0.05$).

4.4 Teacher's overall performance

Teacher's overall performance has been measured using questions question 11 and 17 from teachers' characteristics section which is concerned to lecture delivery and responsibility. To capture the strength of relationship among variable of interests, Pearson correlation coefficients have been computed and a matrix has been made (see table 1).

Table 1: Correlation matrix of overall teacher characteristics, course characteristics, teacher characteristics and tutorial characteristics

Variables	Overall teacher characteristics	Course characteristics	Teacher characteristics	Tutorial characteristics
Overall teacher characteristics	1.0000			
Course characteristics	0.5543 (0.000)	1.0000		
Teacher characteristics	0.7089 (0.000)	0.6249 (0.000)	1.0000	
Tutorial characteristics	0.5120 (0.000)	0.5028 (0.000)	0.5615 (0.000)	1.0000

Note: Figures in parentheses are *p* values (2 tailed).

It can be seen that the overall performance of the teacher is highly and significantly positively related to teachers' characteristics (*r* = 0.7089). The overall performance of the teacher is also positively significantly associated with the course (*r* = 0.5543) and tutorial characteristics (*r* = 0.5120), however, the relation is somewhat weak when compared to teachers' characteristics. Our results get supports from the findings of Chang (1997) and Marsh (1987). Other than that study finds a significant positive association between the course and teacher characteristics (*r* = 0.6249).

Further analysis has been done using ordinary least squared regression where the following equation has been tested;

$$\ln(\text{Overall performance of teacher})_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \ln(\text{course characteristics})_i + \beta_2 \ln(\text{teacher characteristics})_i + \beta_3 \ln(\text{tutorial characteristics})_i + \varepsilon_i \quad (1)$$

Where there are *N* individuals, indexed *i* = 1 ...*N* such that;

- (a) The variable on the left-hand side (L.H.S) $\ln(\text{Overall performance of teacher})$ and taken as regressand.
- (b) The variables on the right-hand side (R.H.S.) are the regressors of the model and ε_i are the error term and residuals.
- (c) $\beta_0, \beta_1, \beta_2,$ and β_3 are the parameters to be estimated.

Appropriate post-estimation testing has been done and results have been shown in table 2. Model 1 shows two-variable regression and it can be seen that course characteristics are significantly affecting the overall performance of teacher which means that a 1 percent increase in course characteristics ratings by students is significantly associated with 0.6 percent increase in overall performance ratings of the teacher.

Table 2: Results of ordinary least square regression (for overall performance of teacher)

Variables	Model 1 (N=70)		Model 2 (N=70)		Model 3 (N= 70)	
	B	t-value	B	t-value	B	t-value
Course characteristics	0.609*** (0.087)	7.04	0.170 (0.106)	1.60	0.156 (0.109)	1.44
Teacher characteristics	-	-	0.538*** (0.096)	5.60	0.516*** (0.101)	5.09
Tutorial characteristic	-	-	-	-	0.042 (0.059)	0.72
Constant	1.438*** (0.070)	20.45	1.305*** (0.063)	20.71	1.306*** (0.063)	20.64
					Mean VIF = 2.06	
	F (1, 68) = 49.53***		F (2, 67) = 51.53***		F (3, 66) = 34.28***	
	R-squared = 0.4214		R-squared = 0.6060		R-squared = 0.6091	

Note: 1. Standard errors are in parentheses, N stands for sample size and * *p* < 0.10, ** *p* < 0.05, *** *p* < 0.01. Cameron & Trivedi's decomposition of IM-test and Breusch-Pagan/Cook-Weisberg test for heteroscedasticity for *H*₀: Constant variance was used and Chi² values came out 14.71 (12), *p*-value = 0.2579 and 0.41 (1) *p*-value = 0.5210 for model 3 which indicates towards acceptance of null hypothesis (no presence of heteroscedasticity).

As study includes one more variable to the regression that is teacher characteristics the results

get affected and the coefficient of course characteristics is no more significantly affecting the overall performance of the teacher. However, the relationship is still positive between the two. This weak relationship between course characteristics and teacher's overall performance has been found in earlier work of Rindermann and Schofield (2001). The coefficient for teacher characteristics shows that a 1 percent increase in teacher characteristics significantly associated with a half percent (0.5 percent) increase in overall performance of the teacher.

After including our last variable that is tutorial characteristics the study gets model 3. The Overall modeling is just right as F statistics show good overall modeling $\{F(3, 66) = 34.28^{***}\}$ and an R-squared of 0.6091, meaning thereby, almost 60 percent variation in regressand is due to our regressors. It is evident from the regression coefficients that still course characteristics is insignificant in affecting teacher's overall performance while teacher characteristics are found to be the only variable which significantly affects the overall performance of the teacher. The tutorial characteristics are also not significantly affecting the teacher's performance however there is a positive relationship between these two.

5. CONCLUSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Based on the statistical analysis, the findings point out a low agreement of students towards course and tutorial characteristics while the majority of students are in high agreement of teacher characteristics are just right. There are no such differences in opinions between master and bachelor program about course, teacher and tutorial characteristics. Study finds a strong association between overall performance of teacher and teacher characteristics but course and tutorial characteristics are not significantly affecting the overall performance of the teacher. However, this relationship is weaker when compared to teacher characteristics but still, course and tutorial characteristics are positively associated with the overall performance of the teacher.

The findings suggest first that the teacher characteristics are the most important aspect of students' ratings. Further, the study gives a benchmark to evaluate course, teacher and tutorial characteristics which may be used for better management of the institutions and studies. The information on these three aspects is all more necessary for a student-centric approach in higher education. The study improves the literature by giving importance to teaching evaluation which is not given proper attention in Indian government universities. The study can be generalised to government universities once it includes a bigger sample size and stream wise analysis is possible with learning outcomes when the placement data is available for the same. This is how further analysis can be done in the future.

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APPENDIX

Please choose according to your level of agreement regarding to the course, teacher and tutorial characteristics item using the scale below.

1= Strong disagree; 2= Disagree; 3= Partially agree; 4= Agree; 5= Strongly agree

COURSE CHARACTERISTICS

1. The course content is just right
2. The level of complexity (hard) is just right
3. The course content is complementing the industry demand
4. The degree of reliability and validity is just right
5. The topics within course are synchronised and are clear
6. The illustration of the topics is evidence-based

TEACHERS CHARACTERISTICS

7. Session plans are clearly explained before the commencement
8. Lecturer makes teaching stimulating and interesting
9. The lecturer is always prepared for each teaching session and questions from students
10. Learning activities are managed to the students' level of understanding
11. Lecture delivery is easily understood
12. Important aspects are summarised and emphasized in teaching
13. Current examples/illustrations are used in the learning process
14. Lecturer emphasizes student's participation in learning
15. Feedbacks on test/assignments are given
16. The lecturer is punctual to the classes
17. Lecturer shows concerns and demonstrates responsibility
18. Lecturer respect students

TUTORIALS CHARACTERISTICS

19. Tutorials are conducted regularly
20. The topics covered in tutorials are important
21. Topics are chosen mutually by the tutor and students for tutorial
22. The level of topics covered in tutorials are just right
23. The tutorials match very well with the main course content
24. The tutorials serve its purpose well