Using student feedback to enhance teaching practices and policies

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ABSTRACT: Student feedback for instructors (or student evaluation of teaching, SET) is widely used to make personnel decisions, yet its strength lies in the instructors' systematic interpretation of data. SETs can provide reliable information on teacher characteristics and teaching effectiveness (Alderman, Towers, & Bannah, 2012; Benton & Cashin, 2012). The National University of Singapore (NUS) introduced SET in 1992, and made it part of the official summative assessment of teaching quality in 1996. However, it can be challenging for instructors to systematically engage in and use SET data to inform teaching development. This paper is part of a larger study that investigates the barriers for using SET as a tool for improving student learning at NUS. Insights from the study aim to:

- **support instructors in utilizing data to guide reflection, regularly reassess their teaching strategies, and improve teaching over time (Edström, 2008; Stein et al., 2012; Winchester & Winchester, 2014);**
- **align institutional policies and practices to support the strong developmental function of SET (Edström, 2008; Roxå & Mårtensson, 2011);**
- **build a dynamic professional development culture (Stein et al., 2012; Roxå & Mårtensson, 2011).**

It adopts an interpretivist research methodology using both quantitative and qualitative data, including literature scan, questionnaires and interviews, and will be done in three phases:

- **reconsider the current SET instrument, in particular to explore the validity and reliability of questions;**
- **understand current usage, perceived purpose, and engagement with SET; and**
- **propose ways to improve teaching practices and policies.**

This paper focuses on the first phase and will explore the question: "Could the barrier for systematically engaging SET in part lie in the design of SET used?" A comprehensive review of the literature on SET question design and a critical analysis of current questions and response data will be conducted. Given what the literature suggests about the kinds of questions to which students can respond meaningfully, we will evaluate the appropriateness of the current set of questions. Study results will enable us to recommend appropriate questions that could have the potential of strengthening the relationship between student feedback, teaching development, and quality of student learning experience.

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