

Differentiating Between Student Evaluation of Teacher and Teaching Effectiveness

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Abstract

Teachers are considered to be principal actors in the teaching process as well as one of its major constituents when quality is concerned. Over the last decade a lot of papers have been published that deal with the quality of the teaching process and teachers. Most of them focus on students as the main subjects in evaluation of the teaching process and teachers. In this paper we analyze freshmen and senior students' ability to differentiate between the evaluation of teacher and evaluation of teaching. In a lot of questionnaires used in research about this topic there is no difference in the approach to these two diverse aspects of the educational process quality. Since students are commonly the main target group of such questionnaires, in this paper we present the results of the study aimed at determining which elements, from the students' perspective, are recognized and associated with teaching, and which ones with teachers effectiveness.

Keywords: Student Evaluation, Teacher Evaluation, Teaching Effectiveness, Teacher Effectiveness, Higher Education, Student Evaluation of Teachers

1. Introduction

Over the last decade a lot of papers have focused on ways of evaluating teachers and teaching effectiveness [22]. Although the need for such evaluation is an obvious necessity for establishing a current level of quality of the educational process and its most important constituents, numerous authors discuss teaching effectiveness, teacher effectiveness, student effectiveness and even university effectiveness without properly differentiating between the mentioned terms. Our analysis of a sample of 14 questionnaires has shown that a lot of questions are identical regardless of whether the questionnaire title refers to teaching effectiveness or teacher effectiveness. Conversely, some questionnaires share an almost identical title stating, for instance, that they are intended for student evaluation of teachers, but have completely different sets of questions. All of the 14 questionnaires are based on students as evaluators of the mentioned two elements. Various definitions of evaluation exist in the literature, depending on the context in which this term is used. In general, evaluation is the process of examining a subject and rating it, based on its important features [13]. The purpose of evaluation, regardless of the subject in question, is to determine the current value of the subject according to the defined criteria in order to improve its quality in the future. Consequently, the evaluation of both teacher and teaching effectiveness is important for improving the quality of the educational process in the long run.

Although there are many [3] different ways to measure the mentioned elements, most faculties and universities use questionnaires which target only students as evaluators of teacher and/or teaching effectiveness. Since teachers are considered to be one of the principal actors in the teaching process that strongly influence the quality of teaching and learning [20] [22], they should be properly evaluated so the current state of teaching can be established

along with the priority among elements that necessitate change. In their recent research, some authors [3] [5] [7] emphasize the need to reevaluate the current tools and instruments used to measure teacher and teaching process effectiveness, respectively.

2. Terminology issues

Our analysis of several scientific sources (Carle, Mortelmans and Spooren, Crumbley and Hughes etc.) concerning student evaluation of teacher and teaching effectiveness has revealed a lack of consistency among the definitions of these concepts. It is not uncommon that the evaluated components in some cases appear in the context of student evaluation of teacher while in others they are used within student evaluation of teaching. Such lack of clear distinction between these two main concepts has resulted in a great confusion in questionnaires administered to students, as well as the subsequent results and data analysis.

SETE is the acronym used by Carle [5] to refer to students' evaluation of teaching effectiveness. The accompanying questionnaire assesses the instructor's overall performance at the end of the course in order to determine whether SETE suggests that the instructor's teaching improves with time. It is also used to establish whether there are any predictors regarding which instructors receive the highest ratings or improve the fastest, and whether the correlates of change differ across face-to-face and online courses. Similar approaches have been conceived by some other authors. Crumbley and Hughes [6] use the acronym SET to refer to student evaluation of teaching. In their study, a conventional SET questionnaire is used for measuring student's satisfaction with the instructor. In the SET37 questionnaire used by Mortelmans and Spooren [18], SET is also defined as student evaluation of teaching, where students evaluate teaching skills such as teacher's presentation skills and teacher's help during the learning process.

Furthermore, in Alauddin and Tisdell's [2] SET data, where SET is defined in the same way as in the aforementioned research, most of the variables are related to the effectiveness of the lecturer (instructor). Apart from SET and SETE, the acronym SEI can also be found in the literature. SEI stands for student evaluation of instruction [25] and it is used as a method for assessing teaching effectiveness that includes only variables related to the instructor. From the above, it can be concluded that all the mentioned authors refer to *teachers* and their characteristics while using the term *evaluation of teaching*.

On the other hand, some authors, when talking about student evaluation of teaching effectiveness, consider both the process of *teaching* and the *teacher* itself as the key actors in that process. Grimes, Millea and Woodruff [9] investigated the relationship between students' locus of control and their evaluation of teaching. For that purpose, SET variables were categorized within three categories of responses: students' evaluation of the instructor, students' evaluation of their own learning and students' evaluation of the overall course. A brief overview [29] of student evaluation of college teaching effectiveness includes a wide range of variables related to the course in general, as well as to the course instructor characteristics and student personality. Heine and Maddox [11] recognized that student evaluation of teaching (SET) primarily focuses on two main areas, students' perceptions regarding their teachers' performance in class and students' perceptions about teaching effectiveness and quality.

First we analyzed literature and existing questionnaires to determinate common categories for teacher evaluation and teaching evaluation. Here we put emphasis on differences and similarities in the existing questionnaires regarding student evaluation of teaching and student evaluation of teacher. When we determined the categories, we conducted a small pilot survey that was focused on identification of teacher characteristics and elements of teaching students find to be most important to be included and evaluated in a questionnaire for student evaluation of teacher and/or teaching effectiveness. Secondly, we tried to establish whether the students are able to differentiate between teacher and teaching effectiveness.

3. Student evaluation of teacher and teacher effectiveness

As one of the crucial resources in education, teachers present a key element that determines the quality of the teaching process. A number of authors and organizations (e.g. OECD, Stronge, Union Pacific Foundation) have recognized the importance of teacher evaluation as the basis for further development of the quality of teaching and educational standards in general. The major purposes of teacher evaluation can be summarized in two functions [20] [22] – improvement of teachers' own practice and ensuring that teachers perform at their best to enhance student learning (i.e. accountability). For this reason, the process of teacher evaluation has become an integral part of the educational practice in many schools and universities (e.g. School of Leadership and Education Sciences at the University of San Diego, public schools of North Carolina, Cambridge Public Schools).

In the context of teacher evaluation, several questions need to be considered. First, the question of who should evaluate teachers – their peers, supervisors, students or some of these combined? While teachers are usually evaluated by their peers and supervisors [8], the adequacy of involving students in this process is questionable owing to their subjectivity, personal opinion, affect etc., all of which can have an impact on evaluation. For instance, Felton *et al.* [7] emphasized a strong positive correlation between the student teacher ratings and the perceived easiness of the course and the sexiness of the teacher. Kozub [14] mentioned a negative correlation between student performance and their ratings. Moreover, the problem of students' adequacy for teacher evaluation can also be considered from another point of view, with the focus on students as customers, i.e. end-users of educational services. In any system or organization, profitable or non-profitable, customer satisfaction is one of the most important goals and customers are the ones who should provide the service provider with feedback. From that perspective, having students evaluate their teachers is very appropriate indeed, especially because they are the ones directly involved in educational process.

Another important question is related to the elements that should be covered within a teacher evaluation questionnaire. Our analysis of the available questionnaires (Rubric of Evaluating North Carolina Teachers, Teacher Evaluation Rubrics by Marshall etc.) has revealed the differences between them, although it is evident that there are certain elements they have in common. The North Carolina teachers' evaluation form [17] is divided into five general standards that refer to teachers: demonstrating leadership, establishing a respectful environment for a diverse population, knowing the content they teach, teachers facilitating learning for the students and reflecting on their own practice. In another form for teacher evaluation by students [24], questions are separated into two categories: explicit curriculum focusing on the question "How well does the teacher teach the core subject?" and implicit curriculum focusing on the question "How well does the teacher model the core values through how he/she behaves with students and with other staff persons?" Each of these two categories contains items specifically related to each of the questions. The domains covered in Marshall's [16] teacher evaluation rubrics are: planning and preparation for learning, classroom management, delivery of instruction, monitoring, assessment and follow-up, family and community outreach and professional responsibilities. It is notable that, apart from other teacher's characteristics included elsewhere, family and community outreach is recognized for the first time in this questionnaire. Similar scopes can be found in the Cambridge Public Schools teacher performance evaluation form [4], including planning and preparation, instruction, learning environment, parent interactions and contributing members of staff, with two additional elements – professional learning and growth and performance of routine professional obligations. More specifically, the single subject student teacher evaluation form of the University of San Diego [27] contains the following categories: making the subject matter comprehensible to students, assessing student learning, engaging and supporting students in learning, planning instruction and designing learning experiences for students, creating and maintaining effective environments for student learning and developing as a professional educator. Web-based student evaluations of teaching (SET) have been contributing to the popularity of students' evaluation of teachers. As an example of an online

SET resource Ratemyprofessors.com [7] can be mentioned, which comprises five rating categories: easiness, helpfulness, clarity, overall quality and hotness. Few more questionnaires about the Student evaluation of teacher effectiveness used for the further analysis are *Assessment criteria used by students in teacher evaluation form* from the University of Turmoil [1], *Student Teacher Evaluation Form* from the Northwestern University [19], *Student Evaluation of Teaching Effectiveness* from the Road to Teaching [23] and the *Teacher Evaluation Form* from the West Virginia Board of Education [30].

It can be concluded that the aforementioned lack of consistency in the approach to the SETE concept by different authors has resulted in variations reflected in the sets of elements included in student teacher evaluation forms. As there is no strictly defined set of elements that should be an integral or mandatory part of a higher education teacher evaluation questionnaire, caution is to be taken in the process of their construction. For instance, items that require respondents' personal opinion should be avoided, as well as those related to teacher's personality. The aforementioned questionnaires clearly suggest which teachers' characteristics, primarily related to teacher's professional competences, methodological and didactic competences and class preparation are considered important.

4. Student evaluation of teaching effectiveness

Although teachers have a great impact on the teaching effectiveness and it is impossible to completely separate them from the teaching process, a conceptual difference between teacher and teaching effectiveness has to be made. Apart from certain teacher characteristics, teaching effectiveness depends on a wider range of elements. Tran and Williamson [26] presented two broadly different approaches in the evaluation of teaching: teaching-focused and learning-focused teaching. According to Ramsden [26], in teaching-focused evaluation the emphasis is primarily on the course content, activities, material, teaching techniques and personal characteristics of the teacher, while learning-focused evaluation focuses on how effectively the teaching affords student learning. In the research by Edstrom and Pratt [26], learning-focused evaluation comprises measuring student's expectations, their involvement and perceptions of the learning environment, the appropriateness of learning activities, indications of approaches to learning, distribution of work over the duration of the course and time on task. Some authors [15] suggested that teaching effectiveness is related to physical attractiveness and vocal clarity, teacher likeability and interpersonal interactions, positive experience, teaching style, teacher extroversion and age, humor, proper workload, clear presentation of the material and preparedness of the instructor as well as rapport and encouragement of questions. Sheenan and DuPrey [21] established that the type and quality of lecture, material content, instructor preparation and challenge of the course accounts for 67% of the variance in teaching effectiveness. The most comprehensive form for student evaluation of teaching and learning is the *Teaching questionnaire Item Bank* from the University of Tasmania [28] which, among others, contains following parts: *lecturer's attitude towards students, lecturer's presentation of materials, assessment of students, workload and feedback, etc.* From the literature analyzed in this section we can conclude that teacher and teaching effectiveness should be evaluated separately. Such a diverse range of elements within a single questionnaire points out the complexity of the teaching effectiveness concept. Namely, the process of teaching apparently includes elements related to teaching materials, formal elements of teaching such as course duration, learning activities and some other elements that are not necessarily related to the teacher.

In some countries students' perception of the teaching process is recognized as very important for improving the educational process. For instance, a project called 'Implementation of a system for on-line evaluation of teaching' [10] was launched in Hong Kong within which a web-based system for collecting data for evaluation of teaching was successfully developed and implemented. Another evidence of the importance assigned to student's evaluation of teaching and learning at the University of Hong Kong is a questionnaire created by Jack [12], which is divided in two main parts – overall evaluation of the course and overall evaluation of teaching. The first part of the questionnaire consists of

items concerning the course organization, materials and workloads, assessment methods, learning objectives and outcomes etc., while in the second part the emphasis is on teachers' explanations, their accessibility when students needed help in the course, helpful feedback provided timely, interactive teaching, encouraging collaboration among students in learning etc. Similarly, in Vietnam a project was founded by the Ministry of Education and Training [26] to develop a common set of questionnaires to evaluate the quality of teaching and the scientific research ability of academics. The resulting set of questionnaires includes four parts, the first one among which, the Course Evaluation Form (CET), is the most relevant for the topic of this paper. Scopes covered in this form are course content, teacher's teaching techniques, conforming to teaching hours, teacher's relationship with student and assessment. A practice of creating such types of questionnaires on the national level can be a useful step towards the unification of criteria of quality in education.

5. Methodology

The main goal of this research was 1) to determine which teacher characteristics and elements of teaching the students find to be most important to be included and evaluated in a questionnaire for student evaluation of teacher and/or teaching effectiveness and 2) to establish whether the students are able to differentiate between teacher and teaching effectiveness. For this purpose, only highly motivated students who wanted to take part in research were included.

The research was conducted among students of the Faculty of Organization and Informatics in Varaždin. The sample includes 30 freshmen (75% male and 25% female) and 30 senior students (76% male and 24% female), who were self-motivated to take part in this study in order to contribute to creating a questionnaire for evaluation of teacher and teaching effectiveness that would consist of elements recognized as important by students.

In order to collect the data, a group of freshmen and a group of senior students was each introduced with the basic facts and goals of the research during their classes and asked whether they wanted to take part in the study. The research was based on two online surveys in form of a questionnaire created by the authors and self-administered by the students. Each survey consists of a total of four items (questions) divided into two parts. First part consists of general questions (gender, faculty and study year) and the second part consists of a one main question divided into three categories.

The research was conducted in two stages and was anonymous. In the first phase the students were given access to the survey with the following question: "Which characteristics do you find important to be included in the questionnaire for student evaluation of teacher effectiveness?" Together with the question, additional explanation was provided: "Please try to list at least 15 elements in order to help us create a better questionnaire for teacher evaluation that would match the criteria important for students." Students were also asked to, if possible, classify those elements into three categories – most important, important and least important. A week after the first questionnaire, students were given the second online questionnaire in which they were asked about the importance of elements for evaluation of teaching and respond to the question "Which elements do you find important to be included in the questionnaire for student evaluation of teaching?" To eliminate the influence on the results, students were separated in two groups, so that one group first received the question about teachers, and then about teaching, while the other group received the questions in a reverse way. The main purpose of this questionnaire was to determine which elements students consider important in the case of their evaluation of teacher and teaching effectiveness. Students had a possibility to list as much elements as they wanted. Based on the analysis from 14 existing questionnaires for students' evaluation of teaching effectiveness and students' evaluation of teacher effectiveness, their responses were sorted within 19 categories mentioned in the Table 1. The possibility for listing unlimited number of recognized elements by each student resulted with more elements in some categories than in the others.

Answers were obtained from 28 freshmen and 25 senior students regarding the question "Which characteristics do you find important to be included in the questionnaire for student

evaluation of teacher effectiveness?”, and from 24 freshmen and 29 senior students for the question “Which elements do you find important to be included in the questionnaire for student evaluation of teaching?”.

6. Results and interpretation

Table 1 shows the results obtained from the abovementioned questionnaires, additionally separated by the students’ year of study. As mentioned, students’ responses were divided in 19 categories, some of which are characteristic for only one type of questionnaire, while others appear in both the teacher and teaching evaluation questionnaires.

Category	Teacher evaluation (%)		Teaching evaluation (%)	
	Freshmen	Seniors	Freshmen	Seniors
1. Teacher’s methodological and didactic competences	27	24	24	21
2. Teacher’s personal characteristics	20	13	/	/
3. Formal elements of teaching	8	11	12	9
4. Teacher - student relationship	10	6	9	6
5. Teacher’s professional competences	6	9	5	3
6. Adequacy of the teaching material	1	2	7	10
7. Teacher’s accessibility	5	6	2	3
8. Atmosphere created by the teacher	8	6	/	/
9. Assistance to students in mastering the material	1	1	/	/
10. Communication	4	4	/	/
11. Assessment	2	4	2	4
12. Use of modern technology	2	4	7	7
13. Preparation for teaching	4	5	4	8
14. Physical appearance	1	0	/	/
15. Quality of teaching materials	1	3	2	6
16. Teacher’s respect for student’s opinion	0	2	3	3
17. Students’ competences (outcomes)	/	/	2	8
18. Classroom climate	/	/	9	6
19. Classroom activities	/	/	12	6

Table 1: Students' responses concerning evaluation of teacher and teaching

In Table 1, the fields marked with (/) refer to elements related to questionnaire categories that were not recognized by students in the respective questionnaire type. Zero is entered in cases where some students in one group recognized the element, while those in the other group did not recognize that particular element at all. Since the requested categorization of elements in three categories (most important, important and least important) did not provide satisfactory feedback, the elements from all three categories were summarized in one. The percentages were calculated on the basis of obtained sums of recognized elements from all the respondents for each of 19 categories, divided by their year of study. Generally, Table 1 shows the importance of each category in the case of teacher evaluation and teaching evaluation, while higher percentages represent higher number of recognized elements in each category.

Figure 1 shows differences in the number of recognized elements concerning student evaluation of teacher, while Figure 2 shows the differences in the number of recognized elements concerning student evaluation of teaching. It is interesting to notice that the same element was rated as the most important in case of evaluation of teacher (71 elements recognized by senior students and 40 elements recognized by freshmen) and evaluation of teaching (65 elements recognized by senior students and 27 elements recognized by freshmen), i.e. *teacher’s methodological and didactic competences*. Most of the answers are related to the methodological and didactic competences of the evaluated teacher, such as clarity, quality and interesting presentations, adaptability to the situation in classroom,

innovation in teaching etc. Another element recognized as important in both categories (27 elements by senior students and 14 by freshmen in case of teaching effectiveness, 33 elements by senior students and 12 elements by freshmen in case of teacher effectiveness) is related to *formal elements of teaching*, which include timely classes, clear definition of student's obligations, timely notification etc.

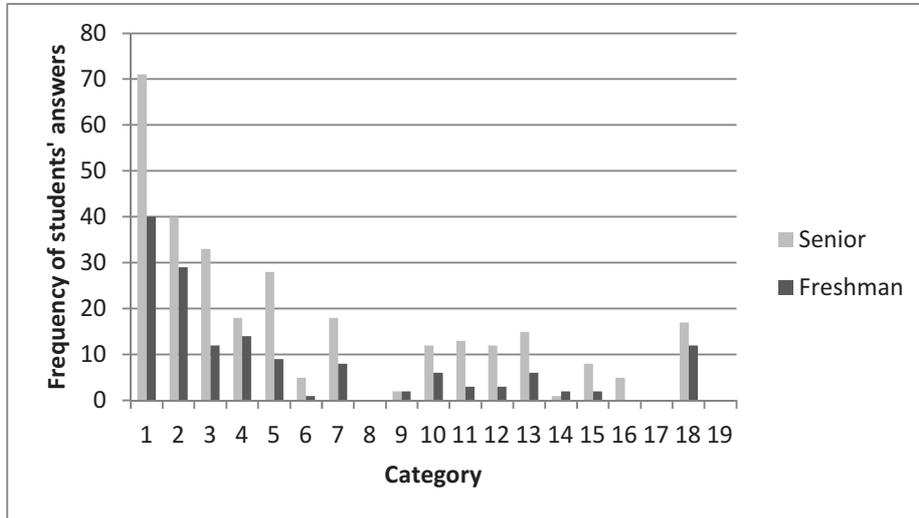


Figure 1. Differences in students' responses concerning evaluation of teacher

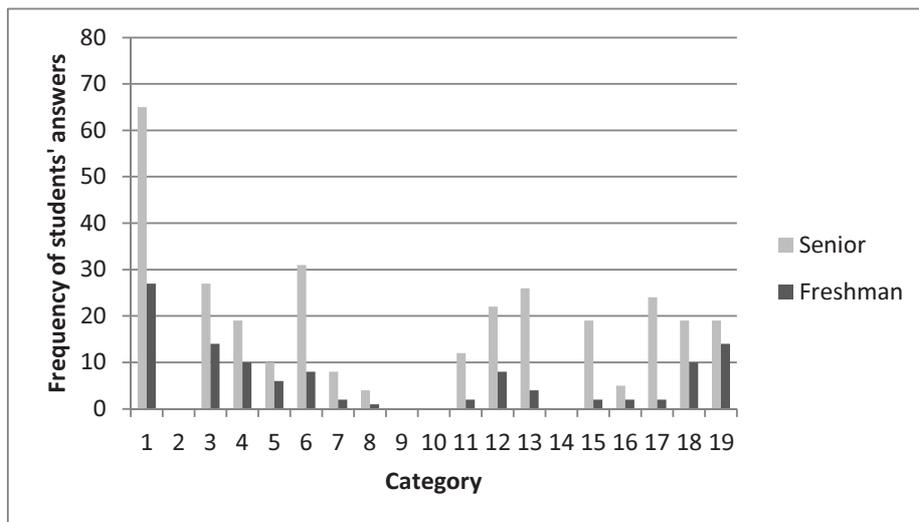


Figure 2. Differences in students' responses concerning evaluation of teaching

Such answers led us to the conclusion that the teacher is considered as one of the most important elements when the teaching process is concerned. For that reason, forms for evaluating teaching usually contain some elements related to the teacher. However, unlike the elements recognized by a large number of students, there are some that occur only in a few responses, such as teacher's physical appearance or hygiene in case of teacher evaluation. As most of the elements appeared in both categories, i.e. teacher and teaching effectiveness, it is obvious that students do not have identical criteria for defining the importance of these elements.

From the analysis of students' responses in both questionnaires, compatibility between 11 categories of listed elements is evident. It is important to emphasize that some of the categories listed in Table 1 are represented with a higher frequency in only one type of questionnaire. For example, *adequacy of the teaching material* and *use of modern technology*

are the elements that students have recognized as more important in the form for teaching evaluation than in the form for teacher evaluation. Opposite, *teacher's accessibility* is more frequently represented in the teacher evaluation form. In spite of the correspondence that was observed in more than half of the elements, some of them are only characteristic for one type of questionnaire. In case of the teaching evaluation form, those elements are *outcomes, classroom climate and classroom activities*. In the teacher evaluation students would like to see following elements: *teacher's personal characteristics* such as diligence, innovation and persistence, the *atmosphere created by the teacher, assistance to students in mastering the material and communication*.

It can be concluded that students do not differentiate evaluation of teacher effectiveness and evaluation of teaching effectiveness, which is also in line with current state in most of the mentioned questionnaires which neither differentiate mentioned elements.

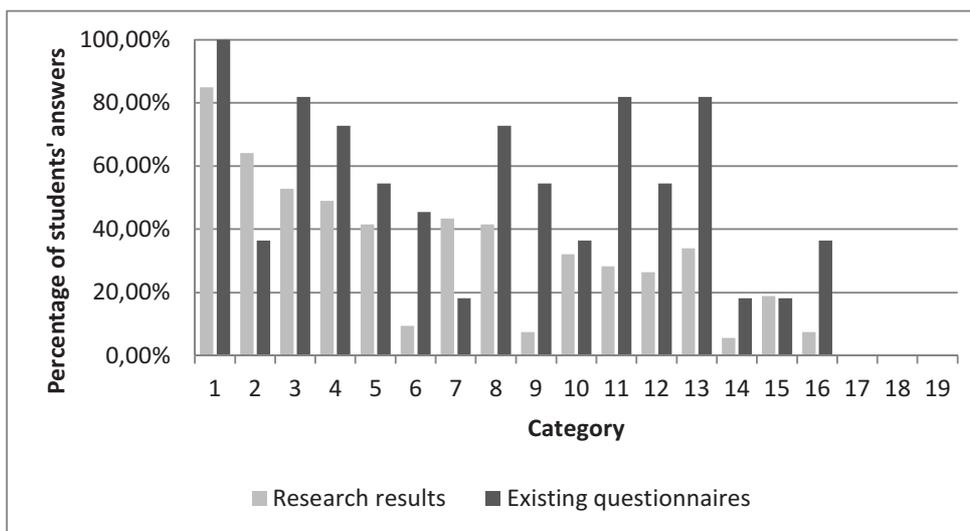


Figure 3: Comparison of research results and existing questionnaires for teacher effectiveness

The comparison between research results (see Table 1) and the existing questionnaires mentioned in this paper are presented in Figures 3 and 4. Items concerning “Existing questionnaires” are showing how many of analyzed 14 questionnaires have question(s) related to each of the 19 categories we previously defined while analyzing questionnaires and literature related to teacher and teaching effectiveness. In the same figure we included percentages for results from the students’ survey. Marked with “Research results” it can be seen how many students did recognize at least one item for each of the 19 categories we defined earlier. It can be seen that certain categories are not present in both teacher and teaching results, since they are focused on just one of them. Categories: *teacher's personal characteristics, atmosphere created by the teacher, assistance to students in mastering the material, communication and physical appearance* are recognized only as part of teacher effectiveness, while *students' competences (outcomes), classroom climate and classroom activities* are associated only with teaching. It is interesting to note that category *teacher's respect for student's opinion* was identified by almost 20% of students as a part of teaching evaluation, while all questionnaires see this item related to teacher evaluation, as well as 8% of students. Research results for teacher presented in Figure 3 and Research results for teaching presented in Figure 4 show the percentages introduces in Table 1. In other words, they represent the students’ perspective of the importance of each category, based on the number of recognized elements within each category for those two types of questionnaires. Additionally, the graph contains the percentages of presence of each category in the existing 14 questionnaires used as a basis for this research/analysis. It is evident that there is a large difference in representation of category elements between the existing questionnaires and the elements that were identified by the students as important for evaluation of either teacher or teaching effectiveness. For the categories *teacher's methodological and didactic*

competences, teacher-student relationship, teacher's professional competences, teacher's accessibility, communication, use of modern technology, physical appearance and classroom climate similar results were obtained when comparing elements identified by students with elements that are included in the existing questionnaires. On the other hand, most of the remaining categories have more elements included in the existing questionnaires than those identified by students, with the exception of *teacher's personal characteristics*, which was more frequently recognized by students. Since questionnaires include more elements than students, we can raise a question if they are focused on elements that are either unimportant to students, or they have hard time differentiating one element from another, as shown in teacher and teaching scenario. When we take this into consideration, is it valid to ask students to grade teachers or teaching process when they obviously have issues differentiating those two key terms? It is logical that questionnaires possess a wider set of questions than those recognized by students, since questionnaires are created by professionals and experts. On the other hand, it is hard to expect valid results from such questionnaires since students have hard time differentiating two key terms, and they don't recognize all the categories.

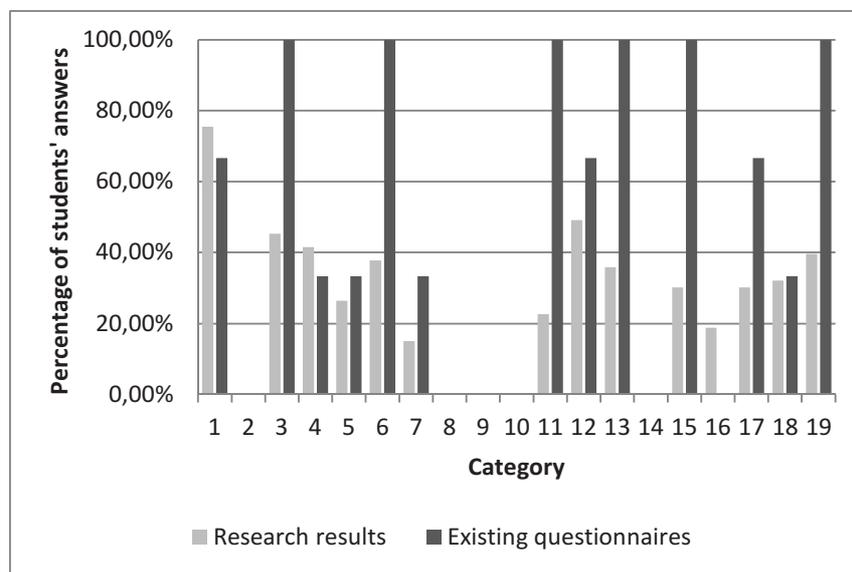


Figure 4: Comparison of research results and existing questionnaires for teaching effectiveness

7. Conclusion

In this paper, the importance of evaluation of teacher and teaching effectiveness has been discussed as well as the students' role in that process. Students' involvement in the process of teacher and teaching evaluation is not rare, especially in higher education. This is supported by the fact that many schools and universities have created their own questionnaires and established a practice of evaluation as an integral part of the educational process. The analysis of a sample of questionnaires in this paper revealed that evaluation of teacher effectiveness and teaching effectiveness are often not clearly differentiated, despite the significant conceptual difference between those terms.

The research among the students at the Faculty of Organization and Informatics provided us with the information about the elements important for the evaluation of teacher and teaching effectiveness from the students' point of view. From the obtained results it can be concluded that, although students do not clearly differentiate teaching process and teacher as one of the most important actors in that process, they recognize some different elements for each category. Also, they have identified few common elements that should be contained in questionnaires evaluating either teacher or teaching effectiveness. Important to note is that senior students, compared to freshmen, do recognize more elements per category, although they do not significantly differ evaluation of teacher from evaluation of teaching effectiveness. That is in line with analyzed questionnaires which, as well, are not making a

clear distinction between those two categories. As it is asked from teachers to grade student's work and not students as persons, same principle on the student side could apply for the conclusion of this paper.

Some limitations of this study are mainly related to the research methodology. It has to be emphasized that this was the pilot research with a small sample size and only high motivated students who wanted to take part in this research, in order to get some preliminary results that could be used as a direction for future researches in this field. Although there were some limitations regarding the methodology, results from this study can be used for improvement of existing questionnaires as well as work with students on their evaluation skills as participants of educational process. If students raise their awareness of the differences between mentioned terms, they can better evaluate teacher and teaching effectiveness which could lead to more accurate results of surveys that are conducted with students as evaluators. Future research is aimed at establishing what criteria teachers find important in the student evaluation of teachers, and also further research of elements that can be evaluated by students in a student teacher evaluation process.

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