Chapter 1
Towards Excellent Teaching Engagement: TES, an Innovative 360° Teaching Engagement Evaluation and Feedback Tool for Professional Development

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ABSTRACT

The teaching engagement scale (TES) is a 360° evaluation and feedback system designed to identify areas for professional development towards improving the student learning experience. It incorporates two unique approaches: (1) it measures engagement instead of module content satisfaction, and (2) it incorporates the feedback from students, the self (reflection), peer and superior. This innovative approach to teaching feedback produces a balanced, specific, and data-driven identification of strengths and areas of improvement that the teacher can use for effective professional development. When professional development is effective, it leads to higher quality teaching, which is vital for student success. As a result of the use of the TES, Taylor’s University has seen an improvement in the quality of engagement over a short period of time.

INTRODUCTION

In the VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous) world of the 21st century, one of the resulting aims of higher education institutions is to promote the development of advanced learning; from learning theories and principles to complex learning processes like critical thinking, problem solving, analysis, and innovating (OECD, 2005). These skills are highly relevant to the context of modern education, and
some researchers say, are even survival skills required to meet the demands of changing industry patterns, globalization, innovation, and human desires (P21 & AACTE, 2010).

As a result, teaching and learning in higher education is becoming more intricate and involves multiple dimensions; therefore linking academic staff development initiatives to productivity is a management dilemma in many universities. The learning process has advanced from the foreordained and very organized learning exercises to being more self-coordinated and disclosure driven learning - a stark contrast. Therefore, in order to ensure that learners can meet these outcomes, many institutions have invested in professional development to ensure that academics are supported in their mastery of the required competencies (Archibald, Coggshall, Croft, & Goe, 2011; Timperley, Wilson, Barrar, & Fung, 2007).

This chapter will discuss the framework and development of an innovative 360° teaching evaluation and feedback tool to inform professional development. This Teaching Engagement Scale (TES) is developed by the Teaching and Educational Development (TED) department within the Teaching and Learning division of Taylor’s University, called the Integrated Teaching and Lifelong Learning Centre at Taylor’s (INTELLECT). Taylor’s University, a private higher education institution in Malaysia is the first university to implement such innovation in this region. The issues and the resulting mechanisms that influenced the development of the system will also be discussed.

BACKGROUND

Research shows that continuous professional development will keep teachers up-to-date on how students learn, emerging technology tools, effective pedagogies, and more. This process is a complex activity and most higher education institutions would provide opportunities for development by requiring academics to attend ad-hoc trainings and seminars believing that their knowledge and skills will improve and later translate into better performance (Timperley, 2007).

However, the literature also shows that most developmental interventions being designed and implemented by institutions are not as effective as they were envisioned to be. Firstly, while student course evaluations are a commonly accepted means of gaining feedback for a myriad of purposes, including the quality of the course and the lecturer, the literature shows that there is less evidence than expected for student evaluations by themselves having an impact on improving teaching and learning (Ballantyne, Borthwick, & Packer, 2000). In many institutions, what is lacking is the follow-up actions towards improving teaching and the presence of feedback from other key stakeholders.

Further exacerbating the issue is that in many course evaluation instruments, specific dimensions of teaching competencies are often not formally communicated and measured, and therefore, academics may not be aware of what they are expected to know and be able to do. Therefore access the appropriate professional development they need may not be available. Such teaching competencies need to be explicitly developed in academics to enable and empower academics to make decisions for their development (Chambers, Geissberger, & Leknius, 2004; Gibbs, 2004; Ho, Watkins, & Kelly, 2001; Pololi et al., 2001).

Lastly, significant change is slowly taking place in terms of the attributes and profile of academics in higher education. One of the reasons for this change is that to ensure that higher education institutions stay abreast of industry developments. Increasingly, industry practitioners are being recruited by higher education institutions to bring their experience into the classroom. Many institutions believe that this move as a response to closing the gap between what is being instructed inside the classroom and what is being practiced in reality. However, while the experience industry practitioners bring is valuable to