

Students' Evaluation of Teaching Effectiveness: Level of Acceptance, Implementation, and Causes for Concern (A Case Study of Saudi Faculty Members at Jeddah University-Kholais Branch)

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Citation: Arafa Othman Mustafa Abdallah and Babikir Abdelmaroof Ahmed Balla (2022) Students' Evaluation of Teaching Effectiveness: Level of Acceptance, Implementation, and Causes for Concern (A Case Study of Saudi Faculty Members at Jeddah University-Kholais Branch), *International Journal of English Language Teaching*, Vol.10, No.3, pp.,24-36

ABSTRACT: *This study investigates the level of acceptance, causes for concern and the frequency of implementation regarding (SETE). To achieve these ends, the researchers distributed an online questionnaire (see Appendix 1) to total of (59) faculty members at Jeddah University – Khulais Branch. The study concluded that, in principle, faculty members welcome (SETE). In addition, the study showed that the most worrying point about (SETE) is the discrepancy between the ways in which students and teachers perceive effective teaching and what constitutes good or effective teaching while the less worrying point is the belief that (SETE) is demoralizing and violates the academic freedom and rights of faculty members. The study recommended that no one should be kept in the dark about the purpose, procedures, and results of (SETE) and all the stakeholders including the administration, students, and teachers should engage in an open and continuous discussion before and after the implementation of (SETE) to alleviate the gravity of the concerns about it and to increase its level of acceptance and viability. More importantly the study recommended that this open dialogue and discussion should concentrate on agreeing on a general profile as to what makes effective teachers and constitutes effective teaching.*

KEYWORDS: students' evaluation, teaching effectiveness, level of acceptance, implementation, causes for concern

INTRODUCTION

It goes without saying that, in all walks of life, performance evaluation is of vital importance. It fulfills various purposes such as crediting, certifying, promoting, placement, hiring, and recognition for outstanding performances. But, more importantly, performance evaluation enables all the concerned stakeholders to identify clearly where they are standing from others, where they

are falling short in terms of their defined and identified objectives and expectations, and where they need to go. This view has been echoed by many experts in the field of performance evaluation. For instance, Hajdin and Pažur (2012) pointed that the function and aims of evaluation, regardless of the subject in question, is to establish the current value of the subject according to the identified standards or principles with the intention of enhancing its quality in the future.

Reviewing the relevant literature reveals that there are plentiful of studies pertaining to performance evaluation and the term has been used interchangeably with performance review, performance monitoring, performance assessment, performance measurement, employee evaluation, personnel review, staff assessment, and service rating (Murphy & Cleveland, 1995). According to Fletcher (2001), performance evaluation is now an umbrella term used for a variety of activities through which organizations seek to assess employees and develop their competence, improves performance, and allocate rewards. In broad terms, Bradfield (1957) defined evaluation as allocating symbols to a phenomenon, with the intention to characterize its worth or value, usually with reference to some social, cultural or scientific standards. However, no one would argue that performance evaluation takes on different dimensions and meanings according to what is intended for evaluation. For instance, the evaluation of faculty teaching effectiveness and classroom practices, which is the primary concern of this study, was defined by Miller (1987) as either (1) a process designed to improve faculty performance (a developmental process), or (2) a procedure that assists in making personnel decisions (a reviewing process). Based on the above definition, the researchers can conclude, in general, that the evaluation of teaching effectiveness refers to the formal process a school, a college or a university depends on to review and rate faculty or teachers teaching effectiveness. Ideally, the findings of these evaluations are used to provide feedback to faculty for the sake of enhancing their performance and consequently guide their professional development. In addition, the results of the evaluation are used to help the human resources department in a school, a college or a university to come to decisions about teachers or faculty tenure or promotion, for example.

For the sake of conducting faculty or teachers' evaluation regarding the effectiveness of their teaching and classroom practices, many and various methods and mechanisms can be used such as online questionnaires, class observation, peer review, surveys, and analysis of student dropout rates (Slade & McConville, 2006). In addition to these methods and mechanisms and according to (Clayson, 2009), students' evaluation of teaching effectiveness (SETE) and classroom practices has been an active field of study for more than eighty years. Hounsell (2003) also maintained that data and feedback on teaching may be collected through evaluation done by students, colleagues or associates, and from self-evaluation data. Therefore, it is clearly evident that the idea of asking students to give feedback on the quality of the teaching that they receive has been established for almost a century. Likewise, the researchers believe that (SETE) is commonplace and perhaps it is inevitable that students at all levels pass judgments on teachers' or faculty teaching effectiveness, personality, and commitment. This is because students as direct and immediate consumers of the

teaching process, spontaneously, have a natural inclination and a compulsive urge to do so. The researchers still correctly recall, while they were students, that their classmates would pass multiplicity of judgments and comments on their teachers' performance and classroom practices that signal praise, criticism, approval, disapproval or even, sometimes, resentment. However, those comments and judgments might have been uninformed, informal and, more often than not, fall on a stony ground.

Recently, (SETE) has been used as a measure of teaching performance in almost every institution of higher education throughout the world (Zabaleta, 2007). The proponents of (SETE) have many claims to believe in it as one of the valid and key performance indicators of teaching effectiveness and a viable option to get feedback on faculty members and teachers' performance with a view to enhancing teachers' instruction and consequently students' learning. For instance, Al Kuwaiti (2015) emphasized that students are the individuals with the greatest exposure to a teacher's performance and are most affected by its quality, so their input is essential to the evaluation of teaching quality and value. In a similar vein, (Selden, 1993, p. 40) seeing students as the biggest stakeholders in the learning process, the intended beneficiaries of the teaching process, and the immediate consumers of it argued that "the opinions of those who eat dinner should be considered, if we want to know how it tastes". Aleamoni, (1981) also expressed his opinion on (SETE) saying that students' ratings of teachers performance encourage communication between students and their instructor. This communication may lead to the kind of students' and instructors' involvement in the teaching-learning process that can raise the level of instruction.

On the other hand, the available literature on students' evaluation of teaching also reveals that opinions are divided on the viability of (SETE) and its downsides have been investigated and reported. According to Marsh and others (1979), few faculty members question the usefulness of students' evaluation of teaching in providing feedback about teaching that can result in improved instruction, but many continue to challenge its use in making personnel decisions. The same point has been emphasized by (Jong & Westerhof, 2001) who noted that students' ratings of teacher performance have been and are still a contested topic in educational practice and among educational researchers. Other opponents of (SETE) have voiced their concerns and argued that students' evaluation of teaching effectiveness surveys often raise issues related to (a) the definition of effective teaching; (b) other variables influencing student ratings, which may not be related to teaching ability; and (c) negative reactions from faculty members (Anderson, 2006; Scott, Stone, & Dinham, 2000). Some other researchers in the field like Moore and Kuol (2005) also have brought the students' ability to assess faculty /teachers' performance into question because of the students' limited knowledge on teaching, and they have also raised their worries towards (SETE) that is based on personal feelings and expectations, leading to students' inability to pass an objective judgment on faculty/teachers' overall teaching competencies.

Despite the criticism leveled at (SETE) and the doubt that overshadows its reliability and validity, the existing literature provides us with examples of many higher institutions all over the world that regard of it as a good option to provide evidence for their improvement of teaching and learning, and for their decisions made on teachers' pay-rise and tenure (Chan, Luk, & Zeng, 2014). So, in order to resolve the dispute over students' evaluation of teaching and establish a middle ground, many studies as well as other professionals in the field have suggested that (SETE) should not be the sole key performance indicator of faculty/teachers and teaching effectiveness. Educational institution, therefore, should be very cautious not to build serious decisions on teachers' tenure, promotion, or termination around it only. Braskamp and Ory (1994) emphasized the same notion maintaining that (SETE) should be supplemented with feedback and data collected from different sources using various methods, like peer reviews, teaching portfolios, classroom observations, self-evaluations and students learning outcomes. Therefore, in order to pass a fair and sound judgment on teachers and their teaching effectiveness, a multiple-source and multiple-method approach of evaluating teaching effectiveness would resolve the perennial dilemma between accepting and rejecting the implementation of (SETE).

Based on the literature reviewed, it is crystal clear that there is a lack of consensus among the experts in the field, faculty, and teachers' attitudes on using students' rating as a key performance indicator of teaching effectiveness. However, the researchers are of the opinion that it is well worth the effort that faculty, teachers, and administrators (formally or informally) seek feedback from students on the effectiveness of teaching and classroom practices for some good reasons. To begin with, all the stakeholders in the educational institution are not pulling in different directions. On the contrary, they are all keen on making sure that learning is taking place and the researcher thinks that communicating and engaging with students in a richer, more deliberate way would serve this purpose and promote positive discussion. Second, feedback from students on teaching stimulates reflection on teaching and in consequence, faculty/teachers understand what aspects of their teaching work, what do not, why, and accordingly take informed decisions to better their teaching. Finally, students' evaluation of teaching effectiveness can be seen as strategy to empower students to have their say and make their voices heard particularly in cultures where students' opinions are disregarded and their ideas are stifled. However, the researchers also uphold the conviction that (SETE) should not be the sole key indicator of faculty teaching effectiveness. Instead, it should be supplemented by more than one source of data on faculty teaching effectiveness, particularly when making serious decisions on tenure and promotion, for example.

From an insider perspective (the researchers), the evaluation of the effectiveness of the teaching of faculty members system in Saudi Arabia and in some other Arab countries needs overhaul because of one major reason: it uses one single source of evidence and this is to not a completely objective activity, because decision makers should draw upon multiple sources of evidence, including students, the instructor, other faculty, and the administrator or employer. The researchers also think that if we support the effective use of student evaluation of teaching, prepare a valid,

reliable, and practical instrument, motivate students to complete end-of-course evaluations, and thoughtfully analyze their responses, we would contribute to the betterment of teachers' instruction and students' learning.

Informed by their experience as faculty members at tertiary education in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere in the Arab world, the researchers noticed that (SETE) is to a large extent a top-down process, administered on an ad hoc basis, and is characterized by a lack of an in-depth discussion among all concerned stakeholders. As a result, faculty causes for concern and perception about (SETE) are not addressed by the administrative bodies. Students, on the other hand, are kept in the dark about its objectives and usefulness. Based on these observations, which represent the problem of the study, this research paper seeks to build on the work about students' evaluation of teaching effectiveness (SETE) with the aims of filling the research gap by contributing to the body of knowledge about (SETE) and promoting dialogue on it. To achieve this, the objectives of this research paper are guided by the following questions:

1. How do Saudi faculty members feel about the idea of having their teaching effectiveness and classroom practices being evaluated by their students?
2. How often is students' evaluation of teaching effectiveness implemented and administered at Saudi tertiary level?
3. Which causes for concern about students' evaluation of teaching effectiveness matter most, which matter less, and which ones are of medium concern to Saudi faculty members?

METHOD

Design

This research is a descriptive one using a survey method as a strategy of inquiry to answer the study questions. Therefore, the researchers adopted the quantitative research paradigm because, as is commonly known, quantitative researches are more interested in the common features of groups of people than in individuals. In addition, quantitative research is centered on the study of variables that capture common features and which are quantified by counting, scaling, or by assigning values to categorical data. Accordingly, Statistics and the language of statistics is undoubtedly the most salient feature of the quantitative research.

Participants

The population of the study was limited to faculty members at the University of Jeddah, namely those who are currently teaching in Khulis Branch at the College of Business and the College of Computer Technology. The study population was not homogeneous in terms of their biographical characteristics (nationality, age, gender, experience and qualifications). Out of the total population of the study (59) staff members were chosen randomly to take part in the study by filling in a questionnaire that has been designed specifically for this study.

Materials

According to Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991), researchers may design questionnaires to explore subjects' attitudes and personal characteristics. Therefore, the researchers constructed a questionnaire specifically to achieve the objectives of this present research study. The preparation of the questionnaire was informed by the objectives of this study, the literature reviewed, and by similar instruments created by other researchers. From this design, the researchers attempted to find out about and describe the faculty members' level of acceptance, causes for concerns, as well as the frequency of implementation regarding (SETE). The questionnaire comprises (17) statements, and next to the statements were five columns with five options: 'strongly agree', 'agree', 'neutral', 'disagree', and 'strongly disagree'. The reliability of the questionnaire was established by using Cronbach's alpha as a measure of consistency coefficient. The Cronbach's alpha of all the questionnaire's dimensions was 0,700. Accordingly, the questionnaire was adequately designed for the participants and was overall reliable. To measure the content validity, the questionnaire was tested primarily by using two expert judgments who expresses their points of view on the validity of questionnaire items. Accordingly, some minor changes were made based on the suggestions of the reviewers to ensure the validity of the questionnaire. Finally, the two professors agreed that the questionnaire was valid and well-planned for measuring what it was designed for.

Procedure

Participants' consent was obtained and they were fully informed about what it means for them to take part in the research. Then participants were asked to fill in an online questionnaire (see appendix 1). Respondents were directed to choose their favorable option. By so doing, it was possible to ascertain the respondents' agreement or disagreement with the questionnaire statements and explore their perceptions about the issue the item discussed. No incentives were provided for the participants and their participations were voluntary. Following this, the online questionnaire (23 items) was collected and analyzed to examine the respondents' views and describe, as it is, the faculty members level of acceptance, causes for concerns, as well as the frequency of implementation regarding (SETE). The informants' responses to each item were calculated and the equivalent frequencies and percentage were taken as shown in Tables 1,2 and 3 below. The descriptive statistics was used to analyze the data and identify any existing trends. The latest SPSS software version 20 package was used in the analysis.

RESULTS

The survey results analysis in Table 1 showed that (79.70%) of the respondents agree to having their teaching effectiveness and classroom practices being evaluated by their students, (72.9%) of the respondent also agree but with some reservation, (24.4%) of the respondents are of two minds whether to accept or reject (SETE), while (13.6%) of the respondents rejected the idea of having their teaching effectiveness and classroom practices being evaluated by their students.

Table 1: Faculty members acceptance of students' evaluation of their teaching effectiveness and classroom practices.

No	Statements	Percentage				
		SA	A	N	DS	SDA
1.	I wholeheartedly accept the idea of having my teaching effectiveness and classroom practices being evaluated by my students.	32.2%	47.5%	13.6%	5.1%	1.7%
2.	I agree to having my teaching effectiveness and classroom practices being evaluated by my students, but with some reservations.	27.1%	45.8%	16.9%	6.8%	3.4%
3.	I am in two minds about the idea of having my teaching effectiveness and classroom practices being evaluated by my students.	10.2	32.2	30.5	22.0	5.21
4.	I reject the idea of having my teaching effectiveness and classroom practices being evaluated by my students.	1.7	11.9	11.9	57.6	16.9

In addition, the analysis of the second part of the questionnaire (see Table 2) revealed that (16.90%) of the respondents strongly agree and (52.50%) agree that their teaching effectiveness and classroom practices is administered once every academic year while (25.4%) strongly agree (40.7%) agree that they have their teaching effectiveness and classroom practices evaluated by their students twice a year at the end of the first and the second semester. On the other hand, (10.2%) strongly agree and (16.9%) that their teaching effectiveness and classroom practices is rarely or never evaluated by their students while (20.14) of the respondents agreed that they never have their teaching effectiveness and classroom practices evaluated by my students.

Table 2: How often is students' evaluation of teaching effectiveness and classroom practices is implemented?

No	Statements	Percentage				
		SA	A	N	DS	SDA
1.	I annually have my teaching effectiveness and classroom practices evaluated by my students.	16.9%	52.5%	6.8%	20.3%	3.4%
2.	I have my teaching effectiveness and classroom evaluated by my students at the end of each semester.	25.4%	40.7%	16.9%	13.6%	3.4%
3.	I rarely have my teaching effectiveness and classroom practices evaluated by my students.	10.2%	16.9%	20.3%	39.0%	13.6%
4.	I never have my teaching effectiveness and classroom practices evaluated by my students.	8.5%	11.9%	8.5%	30.5%	40.7%

As for the causes for concern about (SETE) the analysis (see Table 3) revealed that (74.6%) of the respondents are worried that there are differences between the ways in which students and teachers perceive effective teaching and what constitutes good or effective teaching, (71.1%) are anxious that (SETE) is far from being an objective since it has been found to be influenced by other factors such as course characteristics, student characteristics, and teacher characteristics, (64.4%) of the respondents are alarmed that if (SETE) is used without other collaborative sources of measure, then students become the sole and the primary determinants of a lecturer's success or failure in their academic career, (61.1%) of the respondents are bothered that, to obtain favorable rating from students, some faculty might resort to practices aimed at increasing (SETE) scores such as unduly leniency and grade inflation, (54.3%) of the respondents expressed their concern about the validity of the instruments used in (SETE) and the analysis of the data obtained via them, (52.6%) of the respondents believed that students are not qualified enough to assess faculty performance due to their limited knowledge on teaching, (42.4%) of the respondents agree that most procedures of (SETE) allow little or no space for discussion, explanation, or negotiation with the students, (37.3%) of the respondents agreed that they are not aware of the research on (SETE), neither are they familiar with the literature about it, and finally (27.1%) of the respondents feel that (SETE) is demoralizing and violates their academic freedom and rights.

Table 3: Causes for concern that matter most to faculty members regarding the students' evaluation of their teaching effectiveness and classroom practices.

No	Statements	Percentage				
		SA	A	N	DS	SDA
1.	I am not aware of the research on students' evaluation of teaching effectiveness, neither am I familiar with the literature about it.	11.9%	25.4%	30.5%	27.1%	5.1%
2.	If students' evaluation of teaching effectiveness is used without other collaborative sources of measure, then students become the sole and the primary determinants of a lecturer's success or failure in their academic career.	20.3%	44.1%	13.6%	11.9%	10.2%
3.	Students' evaluation of teaching effectiveness it is far from being an objective measure since it has been found to be influenced by other factors such as course characteristics, student characteristics, and teacher characteristics.	23.7%	47.5%	13.6%	10.2%	5.1%
4.	To obtain favorable rating from students, some faculty might resort to practices aimed at increasing Students' evaluation of teaching	15.3%	45.8%	23.7%	11.9%	3.4%

	effectiveness scores such as unduly leniency and grade inflation.					
5.	students are not qualified enough to assess faculty performance due to their limited knowledge on teaching.	13.6%	39.0%	20.3%	22.0%	5.1%
6.	Students' evaluation of teaching effectiveness is demoralizing and violates my academic freedom and rights.	10.2%	16.9%	25.4%	32.2%	15.3%
7.	Most procedures of students' evaluation of teaching effectiveness allow little or no space for discussion, explanation, or negotiation with the students.	13.6%	28.8%	33.9%	15.3%	8.5%
8.	There are differences between the ways in which students and teachers perceive effective teaching and what constitutes good or effective teaching.	27.1%	47.5%	13.6%	6.8%	5.1%
9.	The instruments used in teacher's evaluation by students are poorly developed and the data gathered from the survey is not always properly analyzed.	10.2%	44.1%	33.9%	8.5%	3.4%

DISCUSSION

Based on the results, we can reasonably conclude, as it is clearly evident, that faculty members welcome the idea of having their teaching effectiveness and classroom practices being evaluated by their students and do not completely reject it. The results also indicated that (SETE) is a common practice and is administered twice at the end of each semester or once at the end of the academic year.

As for the causes of concern about the students' evaluation of teaching effectiveness and classroom practices, the results showed that the most worrying aspect is the discrepancy between the ways in which students and teachers perceive effective teaching and what constitutes good or effective teaching. The second causes of concern that matters most to the faculty members is their belief that (SETE) is far from being an objective measure since it has been found to be influenced by other factors such as course characteristics, student characteristics, and teacher characteristics. In the third place came the concern that if the students' evaluation of teaching effectiveness is used without other collaborative sources of measure, then students become the sole and the primary determinants of a lecturer's success or failure in their academic career. In the fourth place came the concern that some faculty might resort to practices aimed at increasing (SETE) scores such as unduly leniency and grade inflation in order to obtain favorable rating from students.

On the other hand, the concerns that represent a medium concern for faculty members is the belief that the instruments used in teacher's evaluation by students are poorly developed and the data gathered from the survey is not always properly analyzed as well as the popular belief that students are not qualified enough to assess faculty performance due to their limited knowledge on teaching.

As for the causes for concern that matter less, the results indicated that the popular concept that students' evaluation of teaching effectiveness and classroom practices is moralizing and violates the academic freedom and rights came first. In the second place came the faculty awareness and familiarity with the research on students' evaluation of teaching effectiveness while in the third place came the worry that the procedures of students' evaluation of teaching effectiveness allow little or no space for discussion, explanation, or negotiation with the students.

Based on these findings and the discussion, the study recommends that no one should be kept in the dark about the purpose, procedures, and results of (SETE) and all the stakeholders including the administration, students, and teachers should engage in an open and continuous discussion before and after the implementation of (SETE) to alleviate the gravity of the concerns about (SETE) and to increase its level of acceptance and viability. More importantly the study recommends that the open dialogue and discussion among all the concerned stakeholder should concentrate on agreeing on a general profile as to what makes effective teachers and constitutes effective teaching. If all the concerned stake holders reached a consensus on the broad features of what effective teachers and teachers would be like, this would help in upgrading the viability of (SETE) and resolve the most worrying point about (SETE).

Finally, the study also recommends more studies to investigate, address and resolve all the causes of concerns about (SETE)

Funding

This research was funded by the University of Jeddah, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia under the grant No. UJ-20-111-DR

Acknowledgements

The authors acknowledge with thanks and gratitude the University of Jeddah for its moral, financial, and technical support.

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Appendix 1

Dear faculty member,

This questionnaire has been designed to gather information that concerns the frequency of implementation, your level of acceptance, and your causes for concern regarding students' evaluation of your teaching effectiveness and classroom practices. With these three ends in view, your careful completion of the questionnaire will definitely contribute to obtaining fit-for-purpose data, which is crucial for accurate findings. Your information will be kept confidential and will be used just for research purposes. Thank you very much in advance for your time and cooperation.

Note: For more explanation, please do not hesitate to contact me.

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Section1:

This section comprises four statements regarding your level of acceptance of students' evaluation of your teaching effectiveness and classroom practices. For each statement, please, indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree.

No	Statements	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1.	I wholeheartedly accept the idea of having my teaching effectiveness and classroom practices being evaluated by my students.					
2.	I agree to having my teaching effectiveness and classroom practices being evaluated by my students, but with some reservations.					
3.	I am in two minds about the idea of having my teaching effectiveness and classroom practices being evaluated by my students.					
4.	I reject the idea of having my teaching effectiveness and classroom practices being evaluated by my students.					

Section 2:

This section comprises four statements regarding how often the students' evaluation of your teaching effectiveness and classroom practices is implemented in your college. For each statement, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree.

No	Statements	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1.	I annually have my teaching effectiveness and classroom practices evaluated by my students.					
2.	I have my teaching effectiveness and classroom evaluated by my students at the end of each semester.					
3.	I rarely have my teaching effectiveness and classroom practices evaluated by my students.					
4.	I never have my teaching effectiveness and classroom practices evaluated by my students.					

Section 3:

This section comprises a list of statements regarding your causes for concern about students' evaluation of your teaching effectiveness and classroom practices. For each statement, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree.

No	Statements	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1.	I am not aware of the research on students' evaluation of teaching effectiveness, neither am I familiar with the literature about it.					
2.	If students' evaluation of teaching effectiveness is used without other collaborative sources of measure, then students become the sole and the primary determinants of a lecturer's success or failure in their academic career.					
3.	Students' evaluation of teaching effectiveness it is far from being an objective measure since it has been found to be influenced by other factors such as course characteristics, student characteristics, and teacher characteristics.					
4.	To obtain favorable rating from students, some faculty might resort to practices aimed at increasing Students' evaluation of teaching effectiveness scores such as unduly leniency and grade inflation.					
5.	Students are not qualified enough to assess faculty performance due to their limited knowledge on teaching.					
6.	Students' evaluation of teaching effectiveness is demoralizing and violates my academic freedom and rights.					
7.	Most procedures of students' evaluation of teaching effectiveness allow little or no space for discussion, explanation, or negotiation with the students.					
8.	There are differences between the ways in which students and teachers perceive effective teaching and what constitutes good or effective teaching.					
9.	The instruments used in teacher's evaluation by students are poorly developed and the data gathered from the survey is not always properly analyzed.					

