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CAN STUDENTS' EMOTIONAL STATES INFLUENCE THEIR ASSESSMENT OF LECTURERS' PERFORMANCE?

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Abstract

The Student Evaluation Form (SEF) is commonly used to assess lecturers' teaching performance in the classroom. However, there are concerns that events that elicit emotion, such as students' grades, could influence their assessment of their lecturers' performance. Thus, we conducted a study to explore the effect of emotion-eliciting events on students' emotional states and their assessment of lecturers' performance. A random sample of 69 low- and high-ability students (26 control-group students and 43 experimental-group students) from Universiti Teknologi MARA, Johor, participated in this study. Two sets of questionnaires were used: the Positive and Negative Affect Scale and the SEF. The findings of the study indicate that especially for those with low ability, emotion-eliciting events affected students' emotional states and their assessment of their lecturers' performance.

Keywords: emotion in learning, lecturers' performance evaluation, student assessment

INTRODUCTION

Undoubtedly, the relationship between lecturers and students is one of the most important, if not the most important, components of the Malaysian tertiary educational system. As in any effective and efficient relationship, regular assessment through the use of appropriate tools or instruments between the entities (i.e. students and lecturers performance in classroom) should be conducted. In the Malaysian context, the Student Evaluation Form (SEF) is the most widely used instrument to measure lecturers' performance. Lecturers are expected to take appropriate actions to improve their teaching performance as suggested by the findings. In some institutions, the evaluation reports are also used for promotional exercises and strategic decisions such as retention, tenure, curriculum development, external quality care, and research on teaching (Kulik, 2001; Marsch, 1987; McKeachie, 1997; Zabaleta, 2007; Penny 2003).

However, there is some concern about the validity and correctness of the instruments used in evaluating lecturers' performance. Sproule (2002) argued that the SEF is more of a personality-contest measure than an assessment of teaching effectiveness. Kulik (2001) concurred and noted that the ratings used in the SEF were confusing and inconclusive. Centra (2003) and Chonko et al. (2002), however, provide a balanced view. They asserted that although the SEF assessments were generally reliable and stable, they could be affected or potentially biased by student characteristics, especially their emotional states.

Researchers have well documented the fact that emotional states influence students' ability to assess situations. For example, Fredrickson, 1998, argued that students who were in a positive emotional state (i.e. happy or joyful) were more likely to become more creative, flexible, and efficient. Furthermore, people experiencing positive emotions display patterns of thought that are notably unusual, flexible, and efficient (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004). In a similar vein, Pekrun et al. (2002) argued that positive emotions help students to assess a situation rationally.

In contrast, negative emotions (i.e. anxiety and fear) can inhibit students' evaluations. Poor performance or failure to achieve a good grade leads to an increase in anxiety and fear, which affects self-perception capabilities such as self-confidence (Bandura, 1997; Pekrun, 2006; Goetz et al., 2007) and self-esteem (Gross, 2002). Evidence suggests that such students are more likely to incorrectly assess the cause of a problem. This deficit may lead students to seek inappropriate solutions to their problems or not to seek any solution at all, particularly if they believe that the cause of their problem is stable and unchangeable. They are more likely to wait for others to make them feel happy rather than initiate behaviour that would alter their negative feeling (Brickman et al., 1982; Bandura, 1997).

Therefore, we argue that the assessment should not only concentrate on the reliability and validity of the apparatus (i.e. the Student Assessment Form) but also consider students' emotions during the assessment process itself. Unfortunately, current practice does not consider students' emotional states during the assessment exercise. Thus, in this paper, we report on a study we conducted at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Johor, to compare the effect of emotion-eliciting events (i.e. after the announcement of students' grades or after a lecturer had expressed his frustration to the students) on the students' emotional states and their assessment of their lecturers' teaching performance.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The study used a control and experimental group approach. A random sample of 26 students was assigned to the control group and 43 other students were chosen to be in the experimental group. They participated on a voluntary basis. Students were further divided into two groups, high-ability and low-ability students, based on their performance on a pre-test. Students who scored less than 60% were considered low-ability students, and students who scored more than 60% were considered high-ability students. The final classification of the participants in this experimental study is shown in Table 1.

Table 1 The number of students according to ability level

Ability		Numbers of students
High	Experimental group	26
	Control group	15
Low	Experimental group	17
	Control group	11

Instruments

Two sets of questionnaires were used in this experiment: the Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS) and the SEF. The PANAS questionnaire is used to appraise students' affective states. Students were asked to indicate 'how do you feel at the present moment' by rating each of the items using a 5-item Likert scale, where 1 represented 'slightly' or 'not at

all' and 5 represented an extreme level. In this study, a shortened version of the PANAS questionnaire consisting of 18 items was used. Two of the items (e.g. hostile and jittery) were excluded from the scale as they were anticipated to be less relevant to learning.

The SEF was used to evaluate the effectiveness of lecturers' teaching and learning performance. The questionnaire consists of 12 items extracted from the standard form used by UiTM Johor (Table 2). Students were asked to indicate their rating on lecturers' teaching and learning performance on a scale of 1 (very poor) to 5 (very good).

Table 2 The description of each item of the SEF

Item	Statement
1	Lectures are delivered according to the course syllabus. <i>Syarah/kuliah disampaikan mengikut silibus/rangka kursus.</i>
2	This course is well conducted. <i>Kursus ini dikendalikan dengan tersusun.</i>
3	Test/assignment/course assessment given is suitable for the course. <i>Ujian/penilaian/tugasan yang diberikan bersesuaian dengan kursus.</i>
4	Lecturers' explanation/delivery is easy to understand. <i>Penyampaian dan penerangan oleh pensyarah mudah difahami.</i>
5	Lecturer is always willing to help students to understand the course better. <i>Pensyarah sentiasa berusaha untuk membantu pelajar memahami pelajaran.</i>
6	Lecturer is very committed to his/her teaching. <i>Pensyarah mempunyai komitmen yang tinggi terhadap pengajaran.</i>
7	Lecturer is always motivating the students. <i>Pensyarah sentiasa memberi dorongan kepada pelajar.</i>
8	Lecturer is able to attract students' interest in his/her teaching. <i>Pensyarah berupaya menarik minat pelajar dalam pengajarannya.</i>
9	Lecturer uses appropriate level/pace to teach the students. <i>Pensyarah mengajar pada tahap/kelajuan yang sesuai dengan kebolehan pelajar.</i>
10	Lecturer uses clear and suitable examples in class. <i>Pensyarah menggunakan contoh-contoh yang sesuai dan jelas.</i>
11	Lecturer uses suitable teaching aids. <i>Pensyarah menggunakan alat bantu mengajar yang sesuai.</i>
12	Overall, I am satisfied with the teaching and learning process conducted by this lecturer. <i>Secara keseluruhannya, saya berpuas hati dengan pengajaran dan pembelajaran yang dikendalikan oleh pensyarah ini.</i>

Experimental Design

The experimental design of the study is shown in Figure 1. The experiment was conducted in two sessions: during a normal lecture (control group) and after an emotion-eliciting event (i.e. after the results of a quiz were announced in the experimental group). For the control group, the students were asked to answer both of the questionnaires at the end of a normal lecture class. They were asked to first answer the PANAS questionnaire, followed by the SEF.

In the experimental group, the assessment of students' emotional states and their evaluation of their lecturers' teaching performance were conducted after the students had received their coursework results (i.e. a test). In addition, the PANAS questionnaire was distributed only after the lecturers had commented on student's answers scripts and followed by their assessment (i.e. using the SEF) on the performance of their lecturers in teaching. Using a t-

test, data between the two groups were then compared and analysed. The complete flow of the experiment is illustrated in Figure 1.

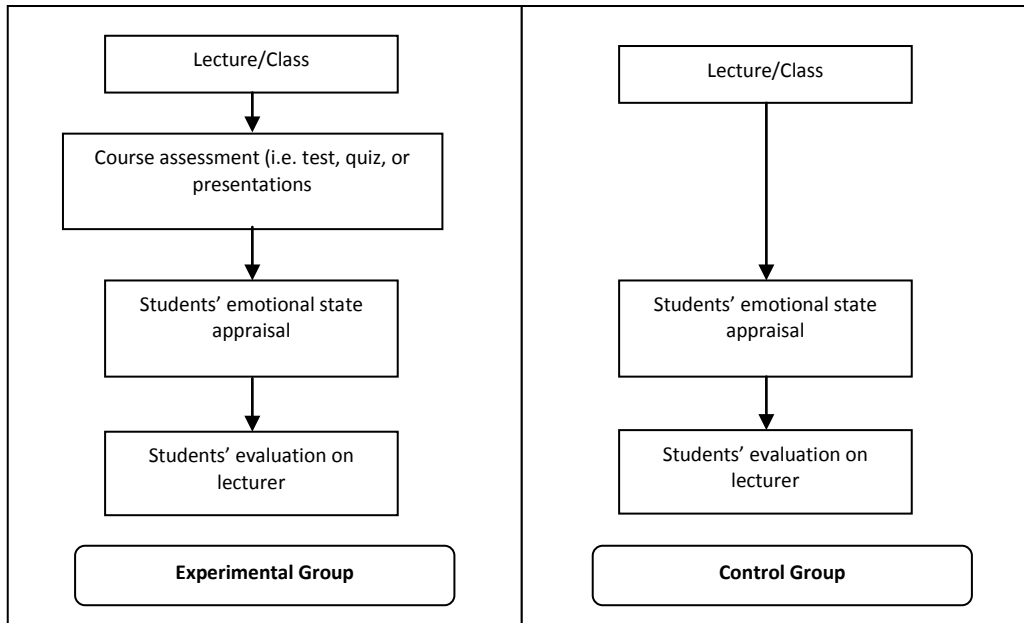


Figure 1 The experimental design for experimental group and control group

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Students' Emotional State

Eight positive items on the PANAS questionnaire were used to calculate the average score of students' positive emotional states, and ten items on the PANAS questionnaire were used to calculate the average score of students' negative emotional states. A summary of both positive and negative emotions are summarised in Table 3.

Table 3 Students' state of positive and negative emotion scores

Ability		Positive			Negative		
		Mean	Std	Sig (t-test)	Mean	Std	Sig (t-test)
Low	Control	3.67	.50	t(28, p = 0.03) - significant	2.65	0.76	t(28, p = 0.25) -not significant
	Experimental	3.29	.61		2.40	1.01	
High	Control	3.82	.73	t(41, p = 0.06) - significant	3.07	1.13	t(41, p = 0.20) -not significant
	Experimental	3.44	.77		2.78	0.84	

In general, it was observed that high-ability students registered higher scores for positive emotional states in both the *control* and the *experimental* group (Figure 2). Bandura's self-efficacy theory offers some explanation for this finding (Bandura, 1991). He asserts that students' emotional states are influenced by their self-efficacy or self-perception of their ability. Naturally, a higher-ability student will have better self-efficacy, and this contributes to better positive emotional state scores.

Both low- and high-ability students in the *experimental* group were observed to have lower positive emotional state scores compared to the *control* group. The differences between the two groups were significant. This indicates that the students in the *experimental* group were affected by the emotion-eliciting event (i.e. getting their quiz results). However, the results were not surprising. Students' self-perception is affected by the outcome of their coursework (Pekrun et al., 2007; Lazarus, 1991; Bandura, 1991). It is common that some students might not perform up to their expectations in a class, and this makes them feel less good about themselves.

By comparison, the *experimental* group had lower negative emotional state scores for both the low- and high-ability students compared to the *control* group. However, the differences in the negative emotional state scores between *experimental* and *control* groups were not significant. This indicates that the presence of the emotion-eliciting event did not influence the emotional state of students in the *experimental* group.

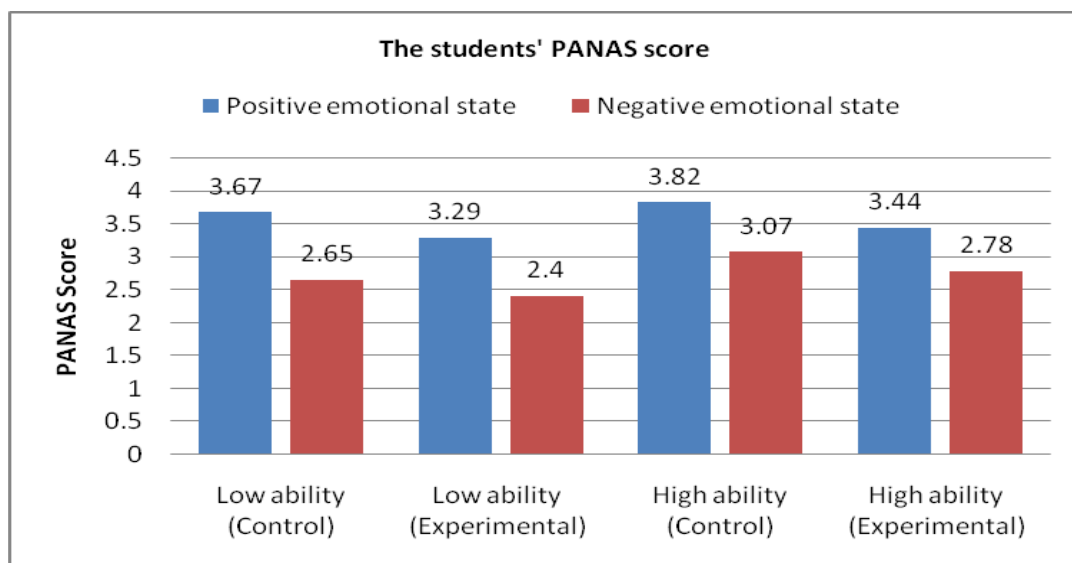


Figure 2 The graph shows the PANAS score for high- and low-ability students in experimental and control groups

Students' Evaluation of Lecturers' Teaching Performance

Low-Ability Students

In general, except for the overall assessment, the experimental group had lower scores on lecturers' teaching and learning ability items as compared to the control group (Table 4). This could be due to the presence of the emotion-eliciting event (i.e. after the results of the quiz were announced). More importantly, the differences noted on three assessment items (Item 1, Item 2, and Item 3) concerning the lecturers' teaching and learning ability were significant (as shown in Table 4).

Table 4 The value of each assessment item in the Student Evaluation Form (SEF) by low-ability students

Ability		Low Control	Experiment
Item 1	Mean	4.67	4.47
	Std	0.49	0.51
	Sig. (t-test)	Yes	
Item 2	Mean	4.75	4.53
	Std	0.45	0.62
	Sig. (t-test)	Yes	
Item 3	Mean	4.67	4.53
	Std	0.49	0.51
	Sig. (t-test)	Yes	
Item 4	Mean	4.67	4.59
	Std	0.49	0.51
	Sig. (t-test)	No	
Item 5	Mean	4.67	4.59
	Std	0.65	0.62
	Sig. (t-test)	No	
Item 6	Mean	4.75	4.47
	Std	0.45	0.62
	Sig. (t-test)	No	
Item 7	Mean	4.58	4.53
	Std	0.51	0.57
	Sig. (t-test)	No	
Item 8	Mean	4.75	4.47
	Std	0.62	0.62
	Sig. (t-test)	No	
Item 9	Mean	4.67	4.24
	Std	0.49	0.56
	Sig. (t-test)	No	
Item 10	Mean	4.67	4.53
	Std	0.65	0.62
	Sig. (t-test)	No	
Item 11	Mean	4.59	4.47
	Std	0.67	0.62
	Sig. (t-test)	No	
Item 12	Mean	4.67	4.71
	Std	0.65	0.47
	Sig. (t-test)	No	

Findings of this study have provided some evidence to support the idea that low-ability students were affected by their emotions in evaluating lecturers' performance (Figure 3). Again, the observed situation can be explained by self-perception theories (Bandura, 1991; Gross, 1999; Lazarus, 1991). They argue that students who do not perform up to their expectations are more likely to be in a state of negative emotion (unhappy or distressed). This, in turn, influences their ability to assess a situation, which was reflected by the lower scores on the items evaluating the lecturers' performance on the SEF questionnaire.

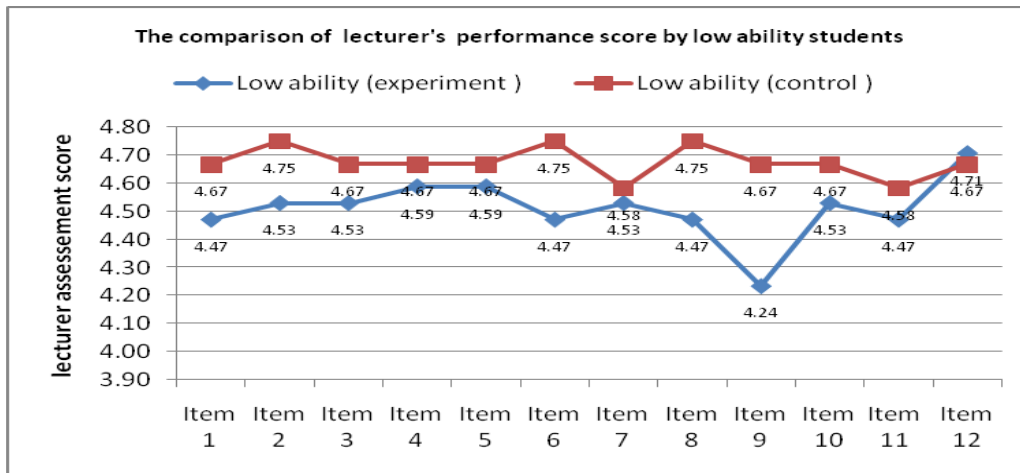


Figure 3 The comparison of lecturers' performance score by the low-ability students

High-ability students

High-ability students in the experimental group were observed to have lower scores on most of the lecturers' teaching and learning items (Table 5) as compared to the control group. However, t-test results for all items on the lecturers' assessment questionnaire between the experimental and control groups were not significant.

Table 5 The value of each assessment item on the Student Evaluation Form (SEF) by high-ability students

Ability		Low	
		Control	Experiment
Item 1	Mean	4.63	4.62
	Std	0.50	0.50
	Sig. (t-test)		No
Item 2	Mean	4.50	4.46
	Std	0.52	0.58
	Sig. (t-test)		No
Item 3	Mean	4.81	4.69
	Std	0.40	0.47
	Sig. (t-test)		No
Item 4	Mean	4.38	4.58
	Std	1.26	0.50
	Sig. (t-test)		No
Item 5	Mean	4.75	4.73
	Std	0.45	0.45
	Sig. (t-test)		No
Item 6	Mean	4.69	4.73
	Std	0.48	0.45
	Sig. (t-test)		No
Item 7	Mean	4.69	4.65
	Std	0.48	0.49
	Sig. (t-test)		No
Item 8	Mean	4.69	4.69
	Std	0.48	0.47
	Sig. (t-test)		No

Item 9	Mean	4.69	4.65
	Std	0.48	0.49
	Sig. (t-test)		No
Item 10	Mean	4.75	4.58
	Std	0.45	0.58
	Sig. (t-test)		No
Item 11	Mean	4.69	4.62
	Std	0.48	0.50
	Sig. (t-test)		No
Item 12	Mean	4.88	4.73
	Std	0.34	0.45
	Sig. (t-test)		No

This has provided some early evidence that the high-ability students were less affected by the emotion-eliciting event. One possible reason is that high-ability students are more likely to have better self-efficacy, which helps them to make better predictions of the outcome of their studies. This, in turn, has helped them to buffer their emotions and be more consistent in assessing a situation.

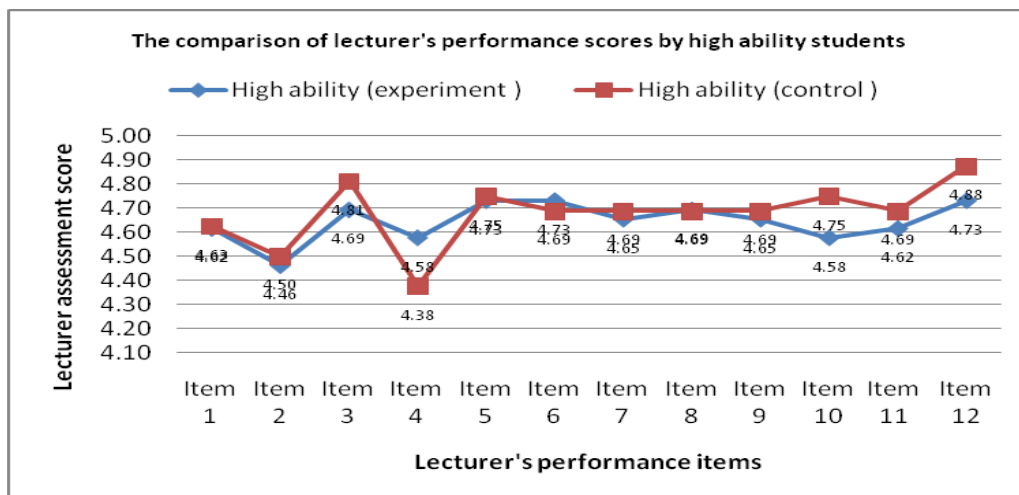


Figure 4 The comparison of lecturers' performance score by the high-ability students

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, there is some evidence that emotion-eliciting events (e.g. exam results and lecturers' behaviour in the classroom) affect students' emotions in learning. It is also important to note that elicited emotions influence the students' assessment of their lecturers' performance in the classroom, especially for low-ability students. Thus, we would like to recommend the following actions to be considered by the relevant parties so that a better and unbiased assessment methodology can be conducted.

1. To conduct the assessment in a more neutral condition (with an absence of emotion-eliciting events). For example, the assessment can be conducted at the beginning of a normal class.
2. To have an anonymous person monitor the assessment without the presence of the respective lecturer.
3. To provide an online session that allows students' to assess their lecturers' performance at their own convenience before the end of a semester.

In the future, we plan to carry out more studies with larger numbers of participants from different higher-learning institutions so that stronger supporting evidence from a broader representation of students can be captured.

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