

**TEACHER EVALUATION PROGRAM BASED ON
STUDENTS' RATINGS: THE EFFECTS OF
STUDENTS' GRADES**

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SUMMARY

This investigation tested the effects of exam grades received by students on the students' evaluations of their professors. In accord with predictions based on reinforcement and on adaptation-level theory, it was found that changes in evaluative ratings given by students to a teacher were significantly related to the students' "obtained grades" and to the students' "relative grades" (i.e., ratio of obtained grade to expected grade).

Before a teacher-evaluation program based on students' ratings can be adequately interpreted and effectively implemented, it is necessary to understand the factors that contribute to the students' evaluations of their professors. Perhaps "quality of teaching" is the overwhelming criteria used by most students. At least, it is the objective advocated by supporters of such programs. However, in a situation such as the one being considered, in which the judges have definite ego involvement in the object of their judgments, it would be extremely naive to believe that other (extraneous) factors do not affect the evaluations they make. The present investigation will attempt to specify, in a real classroom situation, the effects of exam grades on the students' evaluations of their teachers.

Among the hypotheses to be investigated, the first, and perhaps more obvious one is that: *Changes in evaluative ratings given by students to a teacher are positively related to the grades obtained*

by the students in his course. Recent psychological research seems to substantiate this hypothesis. For example, it has been reported that performance evaluations act as social reinforcers, producing liking for the evaluator (Deutsch & Solomon, 1959) and even for persons present during the evaluations (Lott & Lott, 1968). Since the grades that students receive can be considered evaluations of their performance, it would not be surprising that students return the evaluations ("reciprocate") when the opportunity is presented.

Another hypothesis has been suggested by adaptation level theory (Helson, 1964). According to A-L theory, an individual's judgments are based on his level of adaptation, which in turn is based on focal stimulus, background stimuli, and residual. In the present research situation concerning the effects of academic grades, the "residual" factor in a student's level of adaptation may be indexed by his "expected grade" (which is highly influenced by past experience). Thus, it is hypothesized that: *Changes in evaluative ratings given by students to a teacher are positively related to the grades obtained by the students relative to their expectations* (i.e., to the increase or decrease of "obtained grade" as compared to "expected grade"). In this hypothesis, as compared to the first one, the subject's expectations are taken into account in predicting the impact of the academic grade he receives on the changes in his ratings of the instructor. In other words, the second hypothesis tests the effect of social evaluations or reinforcements (grades) in terms of a "residual" measure (expected grade) of individual differences in adaptation level.

Subjects

Thirty-eight undergraduate students from two different classes participated in this study. Eighteen students were from an introductory course in social psychology and twenty students were from a sociology course.

Procedure

The subjects were asked to answer anonymously (i.e., using their own numerical identification) an Instructor Evaluation Questionnaire (IEQ) at two different times. The first administration of the IEQ took place two days before the first mid-term examination (i.e., during the preceding class period). The second

administration was given two days after the grades for such examination had been reported to the students (i.e., four days after the mid-term exam). At the latter administration after the IEQ had been filled out, the S_s were asked to write (on the back of the IEQ) the grade which each had obtained in the mid-term exam.

The IEQ consisted of ten 7-point rating scales covering different qualitative aspects of the instructor's performance (e.g., clarity of presentation of subject matter, knowledge of subject matter, creativity, etc.). In addition, it contained items asking for the student's expected grade in the course, overall grade point average, and grade point average in his major area.

Results and Discussion

An "evaluation change" score was obtained for each S by subtracting the total evaluation score (i.e., the sum of his ten ratings of the instructor) given on the first IEQ from the total evaluation score on the second IEQ. Thus, "evaluation change" scores were positive for favorable change and negative for unfavorable change in evaluation of the instructor.

In order to test the first hypothesis, an analysis of variance was computed on the "evaluation change" scores as a function of grades obtained in the mid-term examination (i.e., using three categories or levels of obtained grades: A, B, and C or below). As predicted, significant difference ($F=4.09$, $p<.05$) in "evaluations change" scores were found for the different categories of obtained grades (i.e., the greater the "obtained" grade, the more favorable the evaluation changes).

The second hypothesis was tested by an analysis of variance of the subjects' "evaluation change" scores as a function of their "relative" grade (i.e., the difference between obtained and expected grade was used to establish three levels of relative grade: Higher than expected, same as expected, and lower than expected). In accord with predictions, significant differences ($F=5.08$, $p<.025$) on "evaluation change" scores were found for the three levels of relative grades (i.e., the higher the "relative" grade, the more favorable the changes in evaluation).

The means and standard deviations of "evaluation change" scores for the different "obtained" and "relative" grade categories are presented in Table 1.