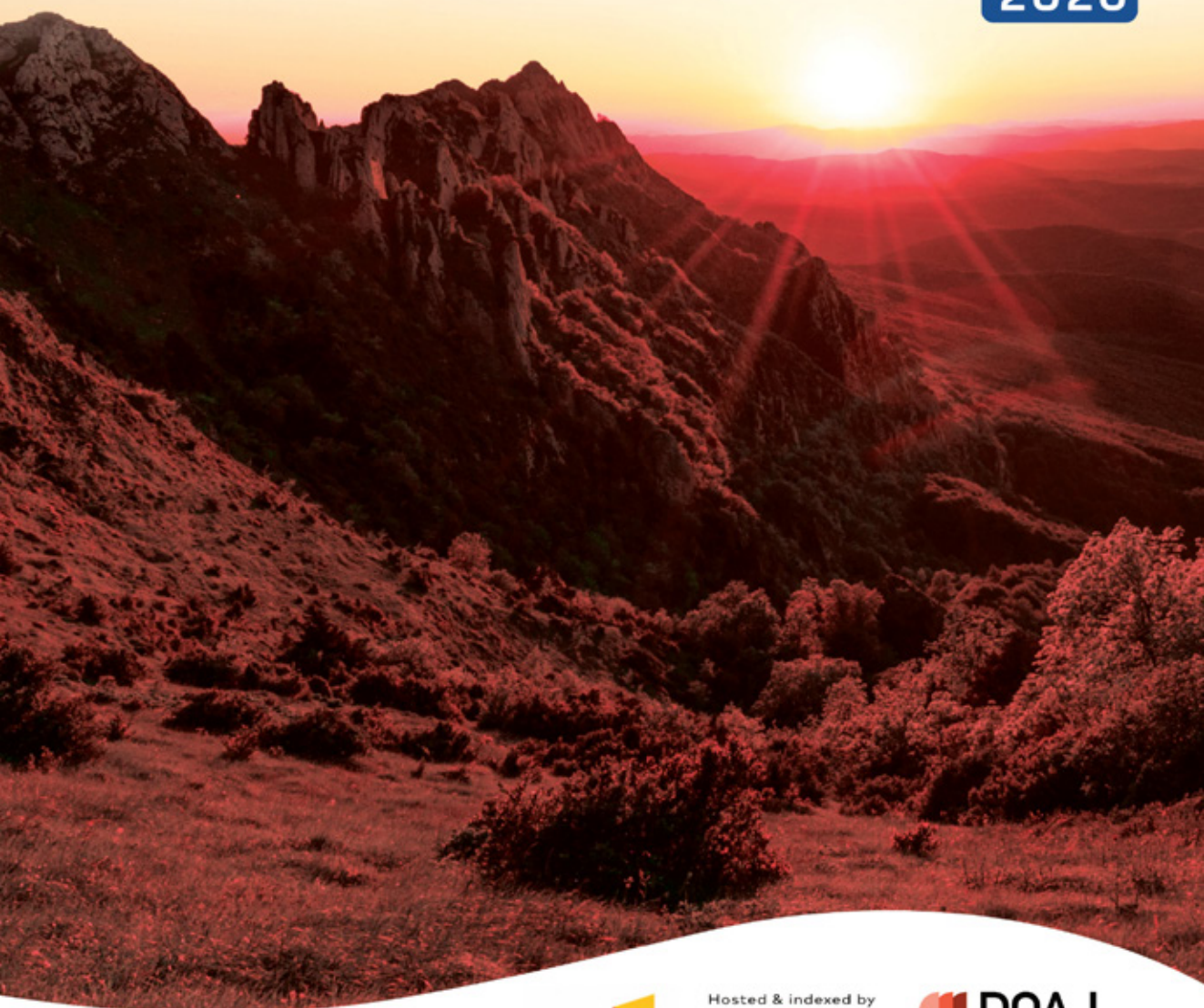


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Improving teaching effectiveness in higher education: Insights from a tertiary institution in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

Student-lecturer evaluations are central to improving teaching quality and achieving meaningful learning outcomes in higher education. Yet, in most tertiary institutions, the evaluations remain fragmented, unstructured, and weakly grounded in theory, limiting their transformative potential. This study addresses this gap by applying Kirkpatrick's Four-Level Model (Reaction, Learning, Behaviour, Results) alongside the Logical Framework Approach (LFA) to develop a structured, evidence-driven evaluation system. Using a mixed-methods case study design, the study integrates quantitative student survey data with qualitative insights from interviews, focus groups, and classroom observations. The findings demonstrate a clear progression of impact: students recognised lecturers' subject competence (Reaction); structured feedback systems improved assessment outcomes (Learning); lecturers adapted their pedagogical practices in response to evaluation (Behaviour); and these changes translated into enhanced student performance (Results). The LFA further revealed that effective evaluation depends on enabling conditions, including institutional MEL policies, resource availability, and systematic consideration of risks and assumptions. The study makes a distinctive contribution by proposing a novel conceptual model that reconceptualises student feedback as a productive system, transforming raw evaluative data into actionable insights that drive continuous teaching improvement. The study, thus, recommends institutionalising MEL frameworks, investing in lecturer capacity for data-driven reflection, and adopting digital evaluation tools. Overall, it demonstrates that embedding theory-informed evaluation systems can convert routine student feedback into a strategic instrument for quality enhancement, aligning institutional practice with ZIMCHE standards and offering a scalable model for higher education in Zimbabwe and comparable contexts.

Keywords: Student-Lecturer Evaluation; Teaching Effectiveness; Kirkpatrick Model; Logical Framework Approach.z--

Introduction

Student–lecturer evaluations are a critical mechanism for enhancing teaching quality, learning outcomes, and quality assurance in higher education. They provide valuable feedback on instructional effectiveness, pedagogical approaches, and the overall student learning experience. However, their impact is often constrained by unstructured and weakly theorised evaluation systems.

In Zimbabwe, higher education has expanded significantly, from one university in 1980 to 21 in 2025, creating both opportunities and systemic challenges. Despite this growth, improvements in teaching quality have lagged due to underfunding, limited staff development, and inadequate evaluation systems (Zishiri, 2025). While the Zimbabwe Council for Higher Education (ZIMCHE) emphasises structured feedback for quality assurance (ZIMCHE, 2021), many institutions continue to rely on evaluation practices with little or no theoretical grounding.

This study addresses this gap by examining how theory-driven frameworks can enhance teaching effectiveness in institutions of higher education. An institution of higher education used as a case study for this research was anonymised for ethical reasons and will be referred to as (T1). Specifically, it applies Kirkpatrick’s Four-Level Model (Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick, 2022) and the Logical Framework Approach (Coryn et al., 2020) to develop a structured, objective, and outcome-oriented evaluation system. Theoretical grounding is essential in addressing the contested nature of student evaluations, which may be perceived as subjective and ego-threatening to academics (Viriri et al., 2021). By embedding evaluation within established frameworks, the study enhances objectivity, reduces bias, and improves the credibility and usability of feedback.

Using a case-study approach, the research demonstrates that integrating these frameworks addresses key gaps in African higher education: the disconnect between student feedback and instructional improvement, the lack of longitudinal impact assessment, and the weak institutionalisation of evaluation processes (Tirivanhu et al., 2020; Attiobgbe et al., 2025). The study evaluates teaching effectiveness, operationalises Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning processes, and generates actionable recommendations. It further assesses the applicability of combining Kirkpatrick’s model and LFA within Zimbabwe’s higher education context, offering a scalable model for improving teaching quality.

Student–lecturer evaluations at a tertiary institution in Zimbabwe have increasingly become a routine administrative exercise lacking the theoretical grounding required to generate actionable insights for improving teaching and learning. This has contributed to apathy among both students and lecturers, reflected in low participation and limited engagement (Kember et al., 2020; Spooren, 2021). The challenge is not unique to T1; global trends also show declining response rates, often falling below the 80% validity threshold, prompting many institutions to adopt mandatory electronic evaluations that ensure participation but not necessarily honest or meaningful feedback (Adams & Umbach, 2022; Silva et al., 2023). In the absence of theory, such evaluations become mechanistic data-collection processes rather than transformative tools for pedagogical improvement (Boring et al., 2021; Hornstein, 2022). At T1, this has resulted in an overemphasis on superficial teaching attributes, producing generic and non-diagnostic feedback that is rarely used to inform instructional change (Darwin, 2021; Flodén, 2023). Mistrust has emerged among academic staff, while students have become disengaged due to the lack of visible impact from their feedback (Heffernan, 2021; Zabaleta, 2022).

Against this background, this study examines whether theory-based evaluation frameworks can enhance participation, improve teaching practices, and strengthen student learning outcomes. Specifically, it investigates whether structured, theory-driven feedback improves student examination performance and pass rates, influences modifications in teaching methods, and enhances student engagement and participation, while also seeking to develop a robust, theoretically grounded student–lecturer evaluation framework for improving teaching and learning outcomes in higher education.

Review of Literature

Contemporary student–lecturer evaluation (SLE) systems remain a paradox within higher education. They are institutionally central to quality assurance, yet epistemologically fragile and often pedagogically ineffective. This study is anchored in programme evaluation theory (PET) (Weiss, 1995), which reconceptualises evaluation as a theory-driven inquiry into not only whether change occurs, but how, why, and under what conditions it is realised. From this perspective, teaching effectiveness cannot be reduced to individual lecturer performance or student perceptions alone; rather, it must be understood as an emergent property of a complex institutional system comprising policies, resources, professional development structures, and feedback mechanisms.

Despite their widespread adoption, SLEs are persistently criticised for their overreliance on perception-based data and their weak theoretical foundations. The dominant evaluative logic privileges student satisfaction, typically operationalised through Likert-scale instruments, as a proxy for teaching quality. However, this assumption is deeply problematic. Scholarly evidence demonstrates that high satisfaction scores do not necessarily correspond with meaningful learning gains and may, in some cases, inversely relate to cognitive challenge and deep learning (Carless & Winstone, 2020; Gomez & Lush, 2020). As such, SLEs risk reinforcing performative teaching practices that prioritise student approval over intellectual rigour.

The absence of a coherent theoretical foundation further exacerbates this limitation. Many SLE instruments are constructed as atheoretical aggregations of items driven by institutional convenience rather than pedagogical validity (Breuer et al., 2020). Consequently, they tend to measure superficial attributes, such as lecturer charisma or approachability, while neglecting core dimensions of teaching effectiveness, including cognitive engagement, feedback quality, and inclusivity (Moore & Evans, 2023; Nilsen & Birken, 2020). Even where psychometric sophistication is achieved, such as through classical test theory or item response models, the fundamental issue of construct misalignment remains unresolved (Suarez, 2020). In this sense, the problem with SLEs is not methodological weakness *per se*, but conceptual inadequacy.

This study advances the argument that the limitations of SLEs are best understood as a failure of evaluative logic rather than a deficiency of data. PET is offered a corrective theoretical stance by insisting that evaluation must be embedded within a theory of change that links inputs, activities, and outcomes through explicit causal pathways. Within this paradigm, student feedback is repositioned as one evidentiary strand within a broader evaluative architecture that incorporates learning outcomes and behavioural change in teaching practice (Sorensen et al., 2025).

To operationalise this logic, the study integrates Kirkpatrick's Four-Level Model and the Logical Framework Approach (LFA) as complementary frameworks. Kirkpatrick's model provides a hierarchical structure for evaluating teaching effectiveness across four levels: reaction, learning, behaviour, and results (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2020; Rasouli, 2023). Its analytical strength lies in exposing the insufficiency of reaction-level data (student satisfaction) as a standalone indicator of teaching quality. By extending evaluation to learning

outcomes, behavioural change, and institutional impact, the model offers a more comprehensive and theoretically defensible framework. However, its application in higher education remains largely superficial, with most institutions confined to Level 1 evaluation, thereby reproducing the very limitations the model seeks to overcome.

The LFA complements this by introducing causal coherence and evaluative rigour. Its emphasis on aligning objectives, indicators, and outcomes, while explicitly articulating assumptions and risks, addresses a critical weakness in SLE systems: the absence of explanatory depth (Schmidt, 2021). By treating evaluation items as Objectively Verifiable Indicators (OVIs), the LFA transforms SLEs from descriptive instruments into analytically robust tools capable of linking teaching practices to measurable outcomes. Nonetheless, its linear and technocratic orientation has been criticised for oversimplifying the inherently complex, dynamic, and context-dependent nature of teaching and learning processes (King & Ayoo, 2020; Diallo & Thuillier, 2020).

Importantly, the integration of these frameworks is further strengthened by insights from behavioural change and learning transfer theories. Feedback does not automatically translate into improved teaching practice; its effectiveness depends on lecturers' perceptions of credibility, self-efficacy, and the availability of enabling institutional conditions (Liu & Gumah, 2020). Similarly, learning transfer theory stresses that pedagogical innovations must be supported by opportunities for application within real teaching contexts (Brion, 2020). These perspectives highlight that evaluation is not merely a measurement exercise but a catalyst for behavioural and organisational change.

Beyond theoretical limitations, SLE systems are also constrained by contextual and institutional factors. Variables such as class size, course difficulty, gender bias, and student expectations introduce systematic distortions that are rarely accounted for in evaluation design or analysis (Al-Ghatifi et al., 2024). Furthermore, the widespread use of SLEs for summative purposes, such as promotion and tenure decisions, undermines their formative intent and erodes trust among academic staff (Bennett, 2021; Salas et al., 2021). This dual-use problem reinforces resistance to evaluation and limits the uptake of feedback for pedagogical improvement.

Taken together, the literature reveals that contemporary SLE systems are not deficient due to a lack of data, but because they are fragmented, overly reliant

on perception-based metrics, and insufficiently grounded in theory. Their continued use in this form risks perpetuating a cycle of compliance-driven evaluation with minimal impact on teaching quality. This study, therefore, contends that the transformative potential of SLEs lies in their integration within a coherent, theory-driven evaluation framework that explicates how feedback translates into behavioural change and improved learning outcomes

Methodology

This study adopted a mixed-methods case study design, enabling a contextually grounded and analytically robust examination of student–lecturer evaluation practices within a real-world institutional setting. Case study methodology is particularly appropriate for investigating complex educational processes within their natural contexts (Yin, 2021). T1, a tertiary institution in Zimbabwe, was selected as a critical and information-rich case due to its structured quality assurance systems and institutional emphasis on teaching effectiveness within a technology-oriented higher education environment.

A stratified random sampling strategy was employed to ensure representativeness across institutional structures and demographic characteristics. Three departments were selected from each of the three schools under study, with deliberate inclusion of gender representation. Data were collected over one academic year (2024–2025) using multiple sources to enhance triangulation and validity. These included structured undergraduate student surveys (Likert-scale evaluations), open-ended feedback comments, institutional records (course grades and progression statistics), classroom observations, and focus group discussions with students and academic administrators. The use of multiple data sources strengthens the credibility and depth of findings in mixed-methods research (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2021).

Data collection and analysis were explicitly guided by Kirkpatrick’s Four-Level Model, which structures evaluation across four levels: reaction, learning, behaviour, and results (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2022; Rasouli, 2023). Level 1 (Reaction) was examined through student survey responses and qualitative feedback on teaching effectiveness and satisfaction. Level 2 (Learning) was operationalised through a comparative analysis of student assessment outcomes before and after instructional adjustments. Level 3 (Behaviour) focused on identifying changes in lecturers’ pedagogical practices through classroom observations and semi-structured interviews. Level 4 (Results) assessed broader

institutional outcomes by comparing course pass rates and performance trends across academic cycles.

In parallel, the Logical Framework Approach (LFA) was employed to operationalise Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) processes. A log frame matrix was developed to align institutional goals (“improving teaching quality and student learning outcomes”) with specific outputs, indicators, and means of verification. For example, the development of a structured student feedback mechanism was linked to measurable indicators such as the proportion of courses implementing standardised evaluation tools. The LFA further incorporated key activities (e.g., staff training, data management processes) and explicitly identified assumptions and risks, including administrative support, resource availability, and student participation rates. This structured approach enhances causal clarity and strengthens evaluation design and implementation (Schmidt, 2021; King & Ayoo, 2020).

Data analysis integrated both quantitative and qualitative techniques. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics to identify trends in student perceptions and performance, alongside pre–post comparisons of assessment outcomes in departments adopting structured evaluation systems. Qualitative data from open-ended responses, classroom observations, and focus groups were thematically analysed to capture patterns in student and staff experiences and institutional dynamics influencing evaluation use (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Analytical integration was achieved through triangulation, enabling convergence and complementarity across data sources.

To ensure methodological rigour, the study incorporated pilot testing of instruments, triangulation of methods and data sources, and member checking to validate qualitative interpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 2020). Ethical considerations were strictly observed, including institutional approval, informed consent, and confidentiality safeguards. The interpretation of findings was guided by the integration of Kirkpatrick’s model and the LFA, enabling a comprehensive assessment of both evaluation outcomes and the contextual conditions shaping them.

Results

This section presents the results of the study, structured in alignment with Kirkpatrick’s Four-Level Model to provide a systematic assessment of teaching effectiveness across reaction, learning, behaviour, and results. The analysis

integrates quantitative and qualitative evidence derived from student surveys, institutional performance data, classroom observations, and focus group discussions, enabling a comprehensive and triangulated interpretation of outcomes. In addition, the Logical Framework Approach (LFA) informs the interpretation by linking observed changes to specific inputs, processes, and contextual conditions, thereby strengthening causal explanation.

The presentation moves from immediate student perceptions to deeper learning outcomes, behavioural adaptations in teaching practice, and broader institutional performance indicators, highlighting both convergences and divergences across data sources. This structured approach allows for a nuanced understanding of whether, and under what conditions, theory-based student–lecturer evaluations contribute to measurable improvements in teaching quality and student learning outcomes.

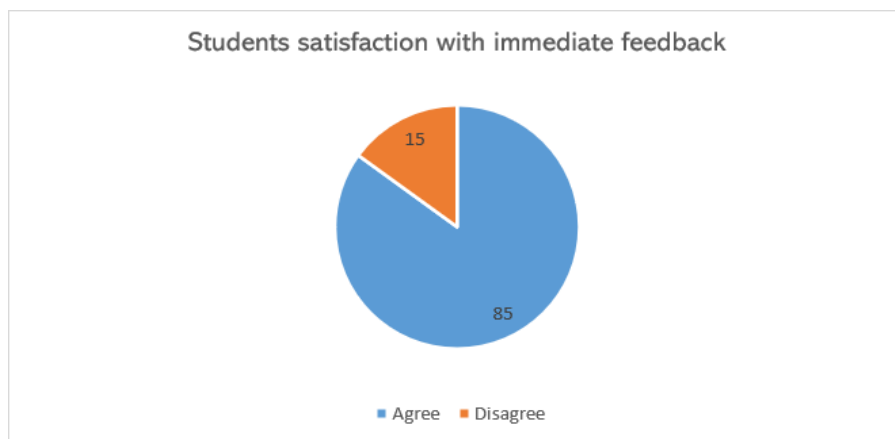


Figure 1: Student satisfaction with immediate feedback

Figure 1 indicates that a substantial majority of students (85%) agreed that they were satisfied with the immediate feedback provided by lecturers, while only 15% reported dissatisfaction. Interpreted through Kirkpatrick's Four-Level Model at the Reaction level, this suggests a generally positive perception of lecturer responsiveness and timeliness in addressing student needs. Immediate feedback is a critical component of effective teaching, as it reinforces understanding, clarifies misconceptions, and enhances student engagement during the learning process.

Results at the Reaction level, interpreted through Kirkpatrick’s Four-Level Model, indicate a consistently positive student response to teaching. On a five-point Likert scale, lecturer satisfaction scores were notably high (mean ≈ 4.2), suggesting strong approval of instructional delivery. Quantitative results are reinforced by qualitative feedback, in which students frequently highlighted lecturers’ subject mastery and the clarity with which complex concepts were explained. Figure 2 goes on to show the Exam scores after structured feedback

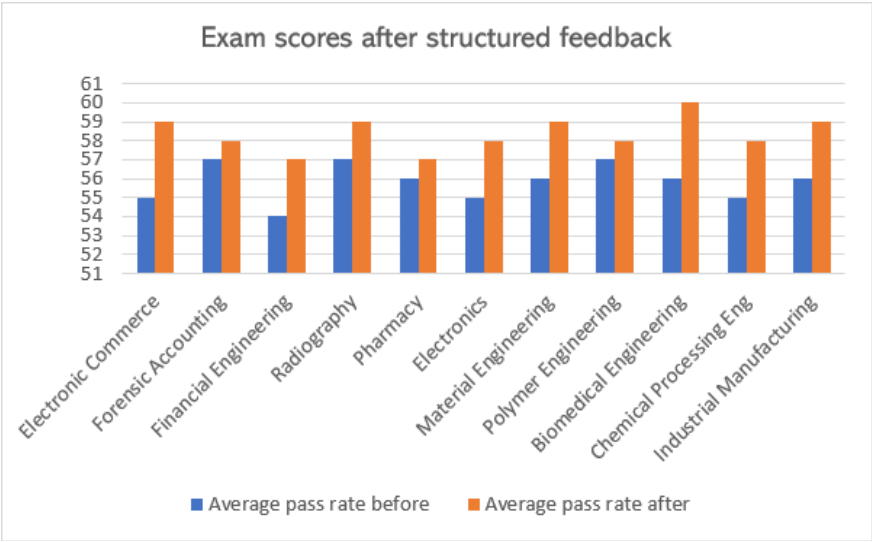


Figure 2: Exam scores after structured feedback

At the Learning level, assessed through Kirkpatrick’s Four-Level Model, evidence indicates measurable, though modest, improvements in student academic performance following the introduction of structured evaluation systems. Comparative analysis of pre- and post-intervention data shows that departments actively utilising student feedback, particularly in Business Management and Engineering programmes, recorded increases in average examination scores, with pass marks improving by approximately 1–4% in courses that had previously experienced high failure rates. In addition, a noticeable reduction in failure rates was observed, suggesting a positive shift in learning outcomes.

Participants attributed performance gains to targeted pedagogical adjustments informed by evaluation feedback, such as allocating additional instructional time to complex or poorly understood topics, refining explanations, and improving alignment between teaching and assessment. Results suggest that when student

feedback is systematically integrated into instructional design, it can contribute to incremental but meaningful improvements in student learning.

While the observed gains are encouraging, they remain modest and context-dependent. From an evaluative standpoint, this underscores the importance of sustained and consistent application of feedback mechanisms, as well as the need to account for other influencing variables such as cohort differences and course difficulty. Interpreted alongside the Logical Framework Approach, these results indicate that structured feedback functions as a key intermediate output that, when effectively utilised, contributes to improved learning outcomes. Nonetheless, further analysis is required to determine whether these improvements are sustained over time and translate into deeper cognitive gains and competencies. Figure 3 shows the percentage of lecturers who adjusted teaching methods following the study of student performance.

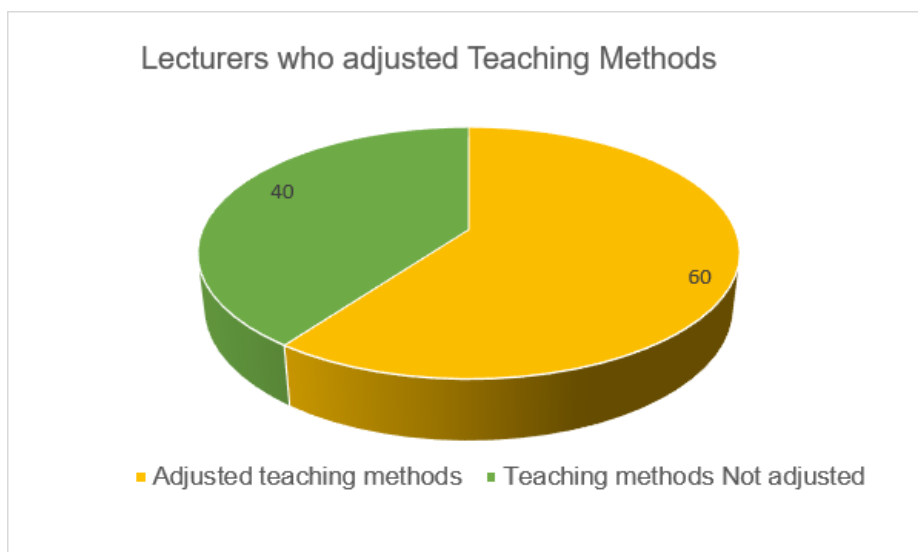


Figure 3: Lecturers who adjusted their teaching methods

At the 'Results' level, the analysis demonstrates that evaluation-informed curriculum and instructional adjustments were associated with improved institutional outcomes. Notably, a revised biostatistics course, adapted to better align with the needs of Radiography students, recorded a 10% increase in pass rates in the subsequent academic cycle. This shift reflects a move from a generic curriculum model towards a more context-sensitive and discipline-specific approach, thereby enhancing relevance and student performance. While causality cannot be attributed exclusively to evaluation processes, the

temporal alignment between feedback-driven changes and improved outcomes suggests a strong contributory relationship. Additionally, departments reported increased student motivation and engagement where lecturers visibly acted on feedback, reinforcing the importance of responsiveness in strengthening the evaluation–learning nexus.

From a systems perspective, the Logical Framework Approach (LFA) analysis provides critical explanatory depth by identifying the enabling and constraining conditions underpinning these outcomes. Institutional commitment to Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL), evidenced by the adoption of formal M&E policies and dedicated evaluation budgets, emerged as a key enabler. Strong administrative support facilitated timely data collection and feedback dissemination, enhancing the responsiveness of the system. Conversely, the analysis exposed structural weaknesses, including fragmented reporting processes and limited analytical capacity among staff. Notably, departments with well-defined evaluation protocols and robust data systems demonstrated greater effectiveness in translating feedback into pedagogical and curricular improvements.

The findings stress that while student–lecturer evaluations can drive meaningful improvements in teaching and learning, their impact is contingent upon institutional capacity, governance structures, and the effective integration of feedback within broader pedagogical and organisational systems.

Table 1 summarises the results for all four levels. Structured evaluations at T1 generated actionable information and correlated with quality improvements in teaching and learning.

Table 1: Merged results for the Kirkpatrick Levels

Kirkpatrick Level	Evaluation Focus	T1 Case Study Findings
Reaction	Student satisfaction and immediate feedback	85% of students agreed that lecturers demonstrated strong subject mastery
Learning	Changes in student knowledge / skills (outcomes)	Departments using structured feedback saw improved exam and assignment scores of 10% or higher (enhanced learning outcomes)
Behaviour	Lecturer teaching practices and application	60% of lecturers modified teaching methods after feedback review
Results	Institutional outcomes (e.g. pass rates)	Improved pass rates (+10%) in courses with evaluation-informed adjustments

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that integrating Kirkpatrick’s Four-Level Model and the Logical Framework Approach (LFA) within student-lecturer evaluations produces a theoretically coherent and empirically grounded evaluation system capable of generating multi-dimensional insights. More importantly, the study advances beyond descriptive reporting by addressing a persistent gap in higher education evaluation: the limited evidence that student feedback translates into learning outcomes, behavioural change, and institutional improvement. The results support a central argument that student feedback becomes educationally productive only when embedded within a structured evaluative logic that tracks outcomes progressively while making enabling conditions explicit.

At Level 1 (Reaction), the significance of positive student perceptions lies not in their descriptive value but in their functional role within the evaluation system. High satisfaction scores (mean $\approx$ 4.2) and qualitative affirmations of lecturer expertise contributed to the legitimacy of the evaluation process, increasing the likelihood of uptake by lecturers and departments. This aligns with behavioural and feedback literature, which emphasises that feedback must be perceived as credible and actionable to influence practice (Winstone & Carless, 2020). In this study, student participation and appreciation of structured feedback reinforced

the evaluative relationship itself, positioning Level 1 as a foundational mechanism that reduces resistance and supports engagement with evaluation outputs.

The analytical contribution of the study becomes more pronounced at Level 2 (Learning), where evidence shifts from perception to measurable educational outcomes. Departments that systematically utilised feedback reported modest but consistent improvements in student performance, including increased pass rates and reduced failure rates. These findings support existing evidence that closing the feedback loop enhances learning outcomes (Hendersen et al., 2021) and challenge the critique that student evaluations merely reflect satisfaction rather than substantive learning. In this context, evaluation functions as a mechanism for instructional alignment, ensuring that teaching practices, content delivery, and assessment are better coordinated to support student learning.

At Level 3 (Behaviour), the study provides critical evidence of pedagogical transformation, with approximately 60% of lecturers implementing changes in response to evaluation feedback. This level represents the key mediating mechanism linking perception and learning outcomes. Without demonstrable behavioural change, improvements at Level 2 could plausibly be attributed to extraneous factors. By documenting instructional adjustments, such as diversified teaching methods and increased student engagement, the study strengthens its causal claim that evaluation systems can drive meaningful changes in teaching practice. This finding resonates with behavioural change theory, which posits that feedback influences performance only when individuals are able and willing to translate it into practice (Liu & Gumah, 2020).

At Level 4 (Results), the study identifies institutional-level improvements, including enhanced pass rates and student retention, particularly in courses that underwent targeted revision. While acknowledging the influence of multiple variables, the temporal alignment between evaluation-informed changes and improved outcomes supports the argument that structured evaluation systems contribute to institutional performance. Notably, the adaptation of course content to specific disciplinary contexts, such as tailoring biostatistics for Radiography students, illustrates the role of evaluation in enhancing curricular relevance and effectiveness.

The integration of the LFA provides additional explanatory depth by revealing the enabling conditions necessary for evaluation systems to function effectively. Institutional commitment to Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL),

including policy support, resource allocation, and data management systems, emerged as a critical determinant of success. The identification of assumptions and risks, such as administrative capacity and staff competence, further underscores that evaluation outcomes are contingent upon organisational context. This aligns with broader evaluation scholarship, which emphasises that methodological rigour alone is insufficient without supportive institutional frameworks (Uwizeyimana, 2020).

Importantly, the study demonstrates that the value of Kirkpatrick's model and the LFA lies not in their isolated application but in their integration within a broader theory-driven evaluation framework. While each framework has recognised limitations- Kirkpatrick's tendency toward hierarchical simplification and LFA's linear logic- their combined use enables both outcome tracking and causal explanation. This integrated approach addresses the fragmentation and atheoretical nature of conventional student-lecturer evaluation systems.

Comparatively, the results suggest that the approach adopted at T1 is both contextually relevant and potentially transferable across similar higher education systems in Africa. Institutions facing comparable challenges of resource constraints and quality assurance pressures may benefit from adopting structured, theory-informed evaluation frameworks. Ultimately, the study contributes to the re-theorisation of student-lecturer evaluations, repositioning them from passive feedback tools to active mechanisms of pedagogical and institutional transformation.

Contribution to Knowledge Body

As a contribution to the knowledge base on higher education evaluation, this study proposes the *Mill of Transformation (MT)*, an integrated conceptual model that reconceptualises student-lecturer evaluation as a dynamic, system-driven process of continuous improvement. The model metaphorically mirrors a 'grinding mill', in which raw student feedback is not merely collected but systematically processed, refined, and converted into actionable insights that enhance teaching effectiveness and institutional performance.

At the core of the MT is the integration of Kirkpatrick's Four-Level Model and the Logical Framework Approach. Within this system, student feedback enters the "input hopper" as unprocessed data. Through a structured analytical process, guided by Kirkpatrick's hierarchical evaluation logic (reaction, learning, behaviour, results) and the LFA's emphasis on causal alignment, indicators, and

assumptions, this data is “grounded” into meaningful, evidence-based insights. This transformation ensures that evaluation moves beyond descriptive feedback toward explanatory and action-oriented outcomes.

A critical feature of the model is its internal filtering mechanism, which ensures that only theoretically grounded and contextually relevant evaluation items are used to generate data. This addresses a key weakness in conventional evaluation systems, where poorly designed instruments produce superficial or non-diagnostic results. Within the MT, validated inputs lead to targeted outputs, namely, pedagogical adjustments, curriculum refinement, and policy improvements, hereby strengthening the link between evaluation and practice.

Equally important is the model’s emphasis on enabling conditions. Institutional support structures, including Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) policies, approved course portfolios, resource allocation, and staff capacity-building, function as the “motor” that powers the system. Without these, the transformation process stalls, regardless of the quality of data generated. Thus, the NMT foregrounds the interdependence between evaluative methodology and organisational capacity.

The proposed Mill of Transformation (MT) advances a systems-based, theory-driven approach to student–lecturer evaluation, positioning it as a continuous, cyclical, and institutionally embedded process capable of driving sustainable improvements in teaching and learning within higher education. The MT contributes an innovative model in higher education evaluative frameworks by equating the process to the operation of a grinding mill. The input of raw grains into the input hopper shows a holistic process of analysis where student feedback data undergoes processing (analysis, interpretation) to produce valuable outcomes (flour/ outputs). Integration of theoretical frameworks demonstrates how structured, systematic evaluation models act as the grinding stones that turn raw data into actionable insights. The grinding mill frame highlights the importance of institutional support through allocation of a budget, policy, and capacity building to stabilise the evaluation process, providing the power sources that drive the evaluation ‘mill’ for sustained improvement of teaching effectiveness. The MT model offers a replicable and adaptable initiative for other higher education institutions seeking to embed evaluation into continuous improvement cycles, especially in the African context.

The MT contributes to a theory of change and conceptual frameworks that specify, in analytic terms, how student–lecturer evaluation data is converted into improved teaching and learning outcomes in higher education. Unlike a metaphorical depiction, MT is defined as a structured transformation model with explicit components, relationships, mechanisms, and feedback loops. Its core purpose is to explain why evaluation produces improvement only when institutional and behavioural conditions allow feedback to be translated into action.

MT begins with defined inputs. The model treats raw student feedback data as a structured information stream [FF], consisting of quantitative ratings and qualitative comments collected through course-level evaluation instruments. However, MT does not assume that feedback is automatically meaningful. A second input, requirement specification [RR], is required to convert raw information into evaluatively actionable evidence. RR includes evaluation objectives and level focus (guided by Kirkpatrick’s logic), alignment rules connecting evaluation items to course learning outcomes and teaching dimensions, and Minimum Evidence Standards that determine whether feedback elements are credible and actionable enough to support improvement decisions. In MT, the input state is therefore {F,R} {F,R}, where [FF] supplies content and RR supplies interpretive criteria.

MT then specifies processes that transform inputs into improvement-ready decisions. The first process stage is interpretive preparation, where feedback is cleaned, coded, organised, and segmented so that each feedback unit can be traced to the relevant course, lecturer, and teaching dimension. The result is an organised dataset DD derived from [FF]. The second process stage is filtering and interpretive analysis, where DD is assessed for action relevance using the criteria defined in [RR]. This stage produces an actionable evidence set [AA] (what should change) along with interpretive explanations II (evidence-based meaning of why change may be required). The third stage is decision translation and improvement planning, where [AA] is converted into logframe-compatible improvement plans [PP]. This translation ensures causal coherence between objectives, targeted actions, indicators, and means of verification, consistent with the Logical Framework Approach’s emphasis on alignment and explicit assumptions.

MT’s transformation is mediated by institutional and behavioural mechanisms. Institutional support capacity [SS] is defined as a set of governance and

resource conditions that stabilise evaluation use. It includes the presence and implementation of an M&E policy, budgetary allocation, administrative coordination that ensures timely data cycles, approved course portfolios that support standardised improvement targets, and capacity-building for data analysis and improvement planning. Lecturer response and capability [LrLr] is the behavioural mediator, representing perceived feedback credibility, interpretive competence, motivation to act, and practical ability to change teaching within constraints. MT additionally requires implementation operability so that findings are routed into follow-up mechanisms rather than remaining as reports.

These mediators produce outputs across a progression consistent with Kirkpatrick and LFA logics. At the teaching level, outputs include improved teaching practices and pedagogical adjustments. At the learning level, outputs include measurable learning-related outcomes such as better performance and fewer failures. At the system level, outputs include programme or curriculum adjustments that translate into improved results, such as pass rates and retention, provided feedback-informed actions are monitored and supported.

Conclusion

This study examined how theory-informed student–lecturer evaluation can contribute to improving teaching effectiveness and learning outcomes in higher education. Drawing on evidence from a Zimbabwean tertiary institution, the study demonstrates that the value of student evaluation lies not merely in collecting students' perceptions of teaching, but in the extent to which such feedback is systematically interpreted, translated into pedagogical action, and connected to measurable learning and institutional outcomes. The integration of Kirkpatrick's Four-Level Model and the Logical Framework Approach provided a multidimensional evaluative architecture that enabled the study to move beyond conventional satisfaction-based evaluation towards an assessment of reaction, learning, behavioural change and institutional results.

The findings reveal a progressive relationship between structured evaluation and teaching improvement. At the reaction level, students generally reported positive experiences of lecturer responsiveness and subject competence. At the learning level, departments that systematically utilised structured feedback recorded modest improvements in assessment performance. At the behavioural level, approximately 60% of lecturers reportedly modified their teaching approaches following feedback, demonstrating that evaluation can influence

pedagogical practice when lecturers perceive the evidence as credible and actionable. At the results level, evaluation-informed curricular and instructional adjustments were associated with improvements in pass rates, including a reported 10% increase following the contextualisation of a biostatistics course for Radiography students. These outcomes should, however, be interpreted as contributory rather than exclusively causal, since student performance is influenced by multiple individual, pedagogical and institutional factors.

Importantly, the study established that student feedback does not automatically produce improvements in teaching and learning. Its effectiveness is mediated by institutional conditions, including management commitment, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) policies, adequate resources, administrative coordination, staff analytical capacity and mechanisms for closing the feedback loop. Institutions with clearer evaluation protocols and stronger data systems were better positioned to translate evaluative evidence into pedagogical and curricular improvements. Thus, the effectiveness of student–lecturer evaluation should be understood as a systemic institutional process rather than an isolated measurement exercise.

The principal conceptual contribution of the study is the proposed Mill of Transformation (MT) model. The model advances understanding of student–lecturer evaluation by explaining how raw student feedback can be filtered, interpreted and transformed into actionable evidence, pedagogical adjustments, curriculum refinement and institutional learning. It further recognises lecturer responsiveness and institutional support as critical mechanisms through which feedback is converted into improvement. The model, therefore, shifts the conceptualisation of student evaluation from a predominantly administrative and compliance-oriented activity towards a continuous, theoretically informed improvement system in which evidence is generated, interpreted, acted upon and subsequently evaluated.

The significance of the study extends beyond the case institution. Although institutional and contextual differences should caution against direct generalisation, the findings provide an empirically informed framework that may be adapted by other higher education institutions in Zimbabwe and comparable African contexts seeking to strengthen quality assurance and evidence-based teaching improvement. The study ultimately demonstrates that the transformative potential of student–lecturer evaluation resides not in the volume of feedback collected, but in the institutional capacity to convert

credible feedback into informed action and to evaluate whether that action produces meaningful changes in teaching and learning.

Recommendations

The findings point to the need for higher education institutions to institutionalise student–lecturer evaluation as an integrated component of their quality-assurance and MEL systems, rather than treating it as a periodic administrative requirement. Evaluation should be embedded within institutional planning, accompanied by clear policies specifying its formative purposes, responsibilities, reporting mechanisms, feedback cycles and links to curriculum and pedagogical improvement. Adequate budgetary, technological and human resources should consequently be allocated to evaluation activities to ensure that feedback is systematically collected, analysed, communicated and acted upon.

Institutions should also strengthen lecturer evaluation and feedback literacy. Academic staff require continuing professional development in interpreting quantitative ratings and qualitative student comments, distinguishing actionable evidence from potentially biased or context-dependent responses, and translating credible findings into appropriate pedagogical interventions. Such development should position evaluation primarily as a mechanism for reflective professional practice and continuous improvement rather than as a punitive measure. This is particularly important given the study's finding that behavioural change among lecturers constitutes a critical mechanism linking student feedback to improved learning outcomes.

A further recommendation is the adoption of integrated digital evaluation systems capable of linking student feedback with relevant teaching, assessment and programme-level indicators. Rather than analysing satisfaction ratings in isolation, institutions should triangulate evaluation evidence with assessment performance, progression and retention data, classroom observations, peer review and qualitative student feedback. Such systems should also enable longitudinal analysis so that institutions can establish whether evaluation-informed interventions generate sustained improvements across successive cohorts.

Student participation should similarly be strengthened by closing the feedback loop. Students should be informed, at an appropriate level, about how their feedback has contributed to changes in teaching, assessment, curriculum design or learning support. Demonstrating that feedback produces visible

institutional responses can strengthen students' confidence in evaluation processes and encourage more thoughtful participation. At the same time, evaluation instruments should be periodically reviewed to ensure that items measure theoretically meaningful dimensions of teaching effectiveness rather than superficial indicators of lecturer popularity or student satisfaction.

At the regulatory and sectoral level, higher education quality-assurance systems should encourage institutions to move beyond measuring whether student evaluations are conducted towards assessing how evaluation evidence is used to improve teaching and learning. Alignment with ZIMCHE quality-assurance requirements should therefore emphasise demonstrable feedback-to-action pathways, institutional learning and evidence of improvement while allowing sufficient flexibility for institutions to adapt evaluation systems to disciplinary and contextual differences. The study itself identifies alignment with ZIMCHE standards as an important dimension of the proposed evaluation system.

Future research should employ longitudinal and, where feasible, quasi-experimental designs to examine the durability of observed improvements and more rigorously distinguish the contribution of evaluation-informed interventions from other factors affecting student performance. Comparative studies across public and private institutions and different African higher education systems would also help establish the model's transferability. Attention may be given to potential biases associated with gender, discipline, class size and course difficulty, as well as the conditions under which lecturers accept, resist or act upon student feedback. Such research would enable the MT model to evolve from a conceptual contribution grounded in a single institutional case into a more extensively validated framework for understanding how evaluation can drive continuous improvement in higher education.

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