

Characteristics and Methods of Effective Teachers: A Qualitative Study of Students' Perspective

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Abstract

The objective of present study aims to analyze the perspectives of the university student about preferred effective teaching approaches. Qualitative description is the research design selected for sampling, data collection techniques and analysis procedures. A purposeful sample of twenty students by using convenient sampling technique was employed (16 males; 4females). Contextual setting of the study was provided by the universities located in Islamabad, Pakistan. Qualitative software NVIVO 10 was used for data analysis. The analyses of word frequency report and word tree are made to gain in-depth understanding about effective teaching. The qualitative model of the study leads to the conclusion that there are two main categories of effective style of teaching i.e. characteristics and methods. Findings of the study suggest that there are different factors perceived by the university students about the effective teaching. Theoretically, the study contributes to the styles and characteristics based literature in general and to the literature particularly on the relationships between styles of effective teaching and students' learning particularly. Particular implications on the basis of qualitative source findings will be discussed in the context of students preferred teaching approaches, teachers' teaching style and university administrators and personal management.

Keywords: *Qualitative Study, Characteristics, Methods, Students' perspective,*

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1. Introduction

Monitoring and evaluating the quality in education sector is pivotal in education system of every country. Particularly, education is considered important but it is also a known fact that the educational process will never be completed without teachers (Saroyan & Trigwell, 2015). Teachers and their actual methods of teachings create an impression and impact on the educational process and develop the learning aptitudes of students. It must be recognized that teaching is a complicated and challenging activity. It requires the enclosure of actual experiences and the development of materials that can give more meaningful learning to the students, skills and attitudes (Awofala, 2012). Effective teaching characteristics and methods, is one of the dominant dimensions in the quality education (Duflo, Dupas, & Kremer, 2015). Extending the notion from this definition it can be induced that the role of a teacher is very essential in the educational process. The characteristics and style of the teaching have a major impact on students' learning. The position of students as major stakeholders in the educational process is much exclusive. Therefore, the conception of students about the teacher's characteristics and style is a major concern of researcher in the field of educational management.

Teaching style is an approach which teacher put into practice throughout the teaching and learning activities. Teaching style is the reflection of the assessment of a teacher and preferred behavior of disseminating knowledge to the students. Research studies in the educational literature posit that teacher's style can put a significant impact on students' effective learning.

1.1 Research Objective

The main objective of present study was to explain the characteristics and style of effective teachers at higher education level.

1.2 Research Questions

1. The study responded the following questions:
2. To explore the perceptions of university students about the preferred style of teacher in the context of higher education
3. To examine the perception of university students about the preferred characteristics of teacher in the context of higher education?

1.3 Significance of the Study

The research has addressed the most imperative issue of teacher style and characteristics perceived by the students in the field of education. Teachers and their competency is the back bone of any educational system. The quality of a teacher is the assurance for the quality in education. By considering the student voice that what actually they prefer about the teaching methods, is an important

issue to be discussed. The study predicts various constructs which should be considered by the teachers to become an effective teacher.

The findings of the study posit that teachers in higher education should equip themselves with the modern pedagogical methods and techniques to enhance the quality of education and student learning experiences. The study also contributes in the missing link through the present literature which mainly focus upon the subjective constructs of an effective teacher. The study also provides subjective and student centric constructs about the quality of teachers at higher education level.

2. Literature Review

In every system of education, teacher is one of the substantial components. Excellence of plans, success of process executed, and surety of desired outcomes greatly depend upon a teacher. Teacher in fact is an operator of the teaching-learning process. Zhang & Fang, (2009) conceptualized teacher style and characteristics into six dimensions: 1) academic qualification and publication, 2) preparedness and subject knowledge, 3) personality trait and personal style, 4) attachment with students, 5) devoutness and enthusiasm, and 6) classroom supervision. University students with different perceptual differences attached different degrees of importance to different dimensions of conceptions about effective teachers. For example, students with the executive thinking style considered that effective teachers would be connected with students, prepared for teaching and equipped with the subject knowledge. Teaching styles are the characteristics by which each individual collects, organizes and transforms the pieces of information into useful knowledge.

There are many factors that affect teaching styles. Teachers have different personalities and attitudes subject to vary over times. In addition to teaching style and the teacher's characteristics changes along with technological, social and culture changes (Walklin, 2002). Effective style of learning and teaching at higher studies demands robust knowledge of the subject matter (Calaguas, 2012). Theory of mental self-government is largely adopted by the researcher to comprehend the notion of effective style of teaching at different educational levels (Li, 2004). The main thrust of the mental self-government theory is the intellectual styles and development that has different ways. Likewise, by employing theory of intellectual styles Zhang & Fang (2009) investigated the preferred teaching styles among university students in Hong Kong and the United States. Furthermore, the study of (Zhang, 2005) suggested that students' preferences in teaching styles varied as a function of their own characteristics, including age, academic disciplines, self-rated abilities and thinking styles. However, the substantive literature review of studies reveals that effective style

of teaching required the investigation of the relationships of students' intellectual styles to their preferred teaching styles in different ways (Moore,2016).The literate review reveals that past studies mostly examined preferred teaching styles from teachers' perspectives rather than from the students' perspectives (Moore,2016). Effective teaching style and characteristics are divergent around the globe due to the governance infrastructure of education in each country.

Furthermore, most of the studies employed the Quantitative or Logical Positivism Paradigm to explore the phenomenon. But as it is revealed from the past theories about the effective style of teaching that it is a subjective phenomenon. The paradigm of logical positivism does not meet the feasibility to assess subjective phenomena. Studies expounded in literature which attempt to discover various characteristics by using various perspectives. The studies in preceding literature have used both quantitative and qualitative techniques to assess the phenomena of effective teaching (McMillan, 2007). Zimmerman, Bockerts, Pitrich & Zeidner (2000) inferred from their study that effective teaching strategies could only be instigated by effective and experienced teachers in a class. Jackson, (2015), described that effective teacher training is unavoidable to produce a good teacher who would be well-trained in the respective domain in achieving educational and organizational goals.

There are various studies explicated in the literature which posit about the teacher style and characteristics and their possible impact on student learning efficiency. However, there are limited evidences that what are the actual styles and characteristics perceived by the students. Previous studies mainly discuss this issue by using quantitative data which does not effectively incorporate the voice of students. Therefore, the current study aims to fill this gap by using the qualitative data to comprehend that what are the essential style and characteristics of a teacher perceived by students. Teacher style according to previous studies are operationalize as the techniques adopted by the teacher to disseminate the knowledge, whereas the characteristics are the personal qualities which are reflected through behavior.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

Fundamental qualitative description was the research design selected for sampling, data collection technique and analysis procedure (Liane & Ginsburg, 2007). This approach is employed to gain a comprehensive summary of facts using the qualitative naturalistic data from the participants. This type of qualitative approach is employed when we require answers to questions about specific events or phenomena.

3.2 Sample Size

A Purposeful sample of twenty students from four business disciplines, i.e. (Economics, Management, Human Resource Management and Finance) was employed by using convenient technique (16 males and 04 females). The age of participant's ranges from 20 to 25 years and the academic levels of the participants was graduation.

3.3 Contextual Setting

Contextual setting of the study was provided by the universities located in Islamabad, Pakistan. Five major universities were selected, i.e., Bahria University, Air University, SZIBIST (Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto Institute of Science and Technology), NDU (National Defense University) and University of Lahore, Islamabad campus.

3.4 Data Collection

The current study employed in-depth interviews to gain comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. The use of the interviews in the field of education is dominant and is considered an effective source to gain in depth understanding (Carnell, 2007). Unstructured interviews were used to gain the in-depth immersion about the effective style of teaching in higher education. The unit of analysis which was incorporated in the current research study contained the students enrolled in universities located in Islamabad, Pakistan. Extent of literature on characteristics and style of teaching was reviewed and unstructured open ended questions were deduced (Carnell, 2007).

Substantively, respondents were asked to respond about the characteristics and style of teaching in higher education. The average mean duration of the interview was 20 to 30 minutes for each respondent. The issues of confidentiality and ethical consideration were taken into account and a formal informed consent was obtained from each respondent to record the interview digitally. Unstructured interviews are effective to explore the subjective phenomena by using fundamental qualitative approach (Sheila, 2010).

3.5 Data Analysis

The transcription process is a critical element in data analysis and the central in qualitative research (Carnell, 2007; Penny, 2003). NVIVO 10 software was used to analyze the unstructured qualitative data. The first step towards the data analysis is importing the data to internal source into NVIVO. The second step involved the transcription of data through recorded interviews carefully and correctly. After transcription the auto coding was run on all the recorded interviews. After transcribing, the process of coding was done by making nodes demanded by the transcribed data. Different reports of the qualitative data were generated by NVIVO software mainly, word frequency report, tree map, tag

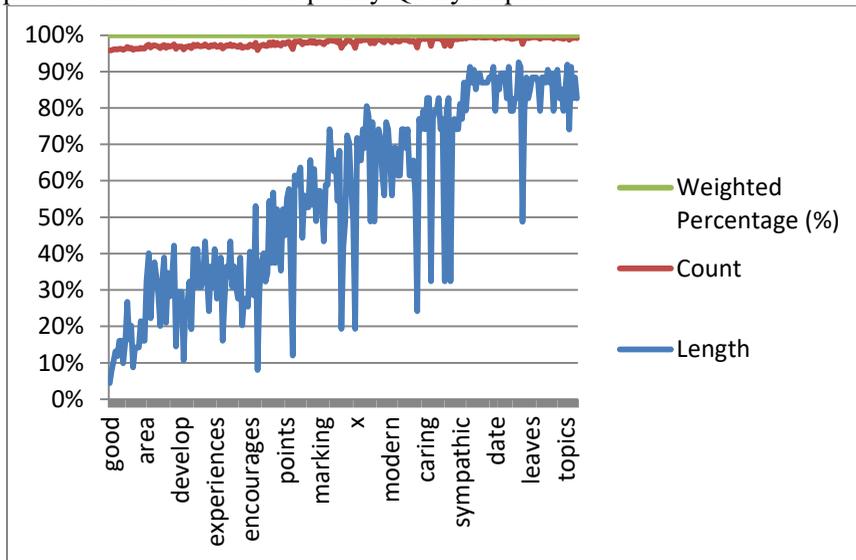
cloud and proposed model to effectively understand the major dimensions of the effective teacher characteristics.

4. Results

The following section presents the results based on qualitative data. The following table 1 is showing the word frequency query report about the recorded unstructured interviews.

Table 4.1

Graphical Chart of Word Frequency Query Report



Word frequency query diagram states the list of most frequently occurring words from the source. It only provides the details about the contextual content of the sources. It states the most common feature of the style of effective teaching. Examination of the report illustrates that 20 to 25% of the contextual content sources contain the discussion about the word “Good Communication”. During the process of conducting interviews and transcription, it was noted that respondents replied that the communication skill is one of the major characteristics of effective teaching. The word frequency query reported that 30 to 40% respondent’s discussion was about the subject area and punctuality.

The rigorous transcription and detailed interview process shows that if providing practical example related to the topic is also one of the main characteristics of effective teaching. Theme of the command over subject is emerged when respondents were discussing about the methods of effective teaching. Similarly, the word humor and fair marking were reported as 50% to

60% in the whole discussion and it is asserted that as one of the major characteristics of effective teaching. Furthermore, 70 to 80% discussions of respondents show that sympathetic and caring behavior is another characteristic of an effective teacher. Word query only provided the details about the contextual content of the sources. Moreover, in depth analyses of the qualitative sources were made to identify the substantive themes of the study.

Table 4.2

Significant Nodes of Effective Teacher Characteristics

Nodes compared by number of items coded



Table 4.2 reports the result about the main themes of the characteristics of effective teaching. Significance of the theme is decided on the size of the boxes. The larger size of the box reflects the higher level of significance. One of the significant node compared by number of items coded are mainly, Kindness and Sympathy, Knowledge, Attractive personality and Punctuality. Furthermore, the coding of the nodes about the teacher characteristics shows other different less significant nodes also. These less significant nodes were mainly communication skills and other behavioral characteristics such as humorous nature, sense of belonging and providing equal opportunities.

Table 4.3

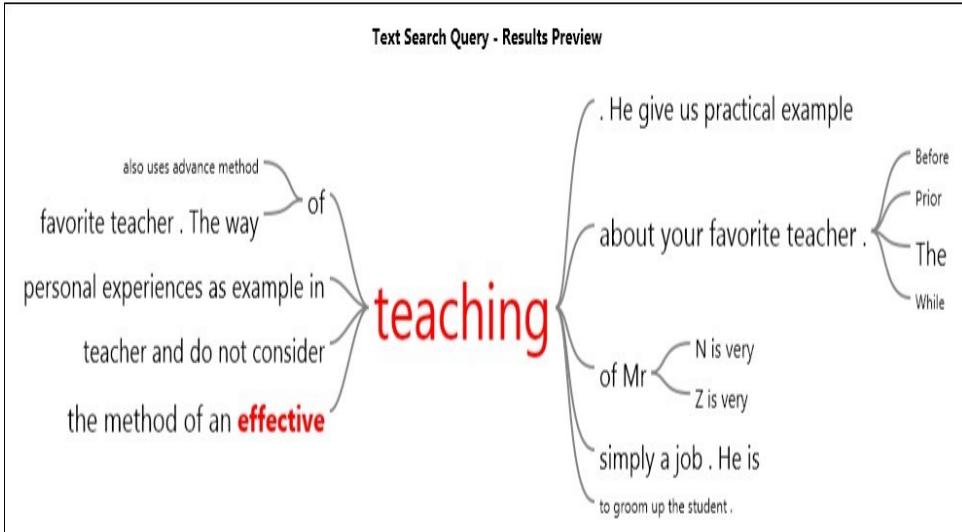
Significant Nodes of Effective Teacher Methods

Nodes compared by number of items coded



Table 4.3 reports, the result about the main theme when the respondents were discussing about the methods of effective teaching in higher education. The size of the boxes is the sources to comprehend the significance of a particular theme. One of the significant node compared by the numbers of item coded are mainly, the use of Multimedia, Work as a Team, Advancing Practical Examples related to the topic contents and Equal & Fair marking. Other less significant nodes were mainly reported as Communication Skills, Sense of Belonging and Providing Equal Opportunity to each student to participate in the class discussion.

Table 4.4
Word Tree of the Effective Teaching Text Search Query



To analyze the qualitative unstructured data, word tree result preview is useful tool to comprehend the contextual setting of the word used in the process of interview conduction. It is an effective way to explore the characteristics with particular text search query. Table 4, presents a logical contextual setting of the words used about the effective teaching. The logical contextual view of the study illustrates that when respondents replied about effective teaching, they mainly focused upon the practical example which are related about the topic during the class. The word tree report solely depends upon the quality of transcription and the process of interviews. It merely involves the personal conception of the respondents about effective teaching styles.

Table 4.5
Qualitative Model of the Study

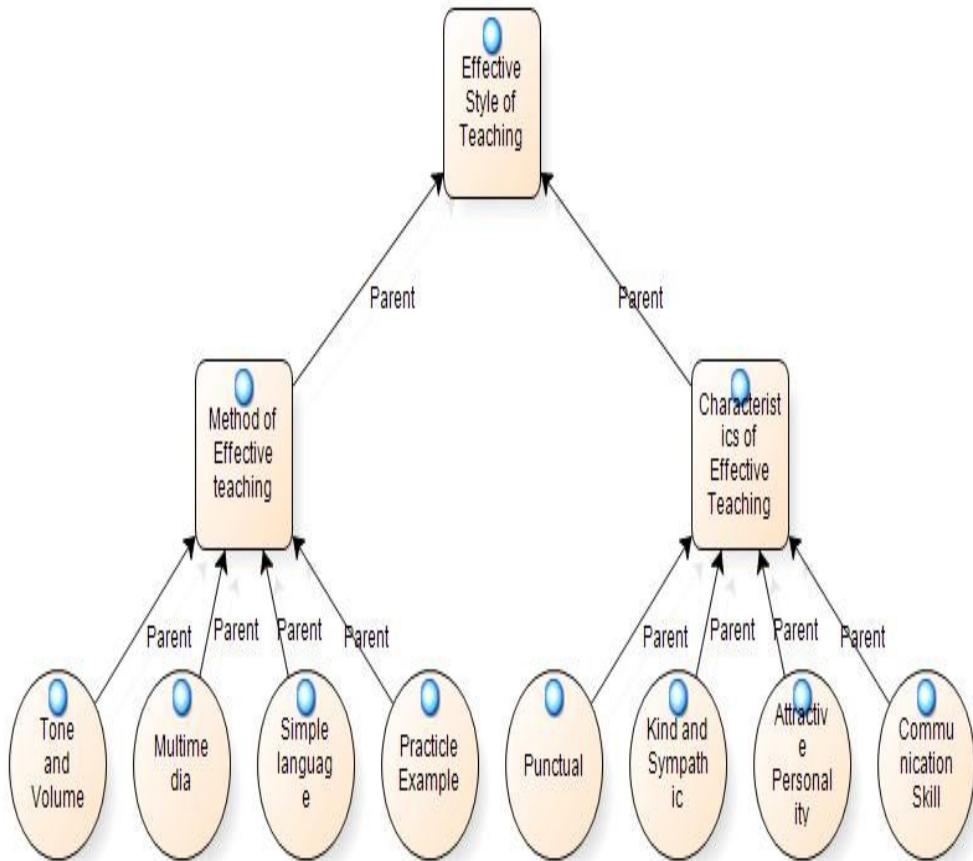


Table 4.5 reports the qualitative model of the study generated by NVIVO 10 software. The hierarchical qualitative model shows the major themes of the characteristics and methods of effective teaching. This qualitative model is built on the basis of coding the major nodes of the source data. Auto coding technique was employed to make the dominant nodes of the source data. The parent node of the characteristics of effective teacher exclusively includes Punctual, Kindness and Sympathy, Attractive and Communication Skills according to student's perspective. The parent node of the second research question which was about

the methods of effective teaching are namely, Practical Example, Tone and Volume, Multimedia, Simple Language. All of these factors reflect the perceived conception of characteristics and method of effective teaching by the students enrolled in universities.

5. Discussion

Major findings of the study report that the key attributes of an effective teacher are Punctuality and Kindness respectively. While the significant methods of effective teaching are Practical Example, Tone and Volume, Multimedia and Simple Language. The findings of the present study are best aligned to the previous studies expounded in the literature. The findings of the study are consistent with existing study of (Zhang, 2005). They posit that effective style of teaching requires sound knowledge, communication skill, uses of advance multimedia technique to transmit the knowledge, attractive personality, appropriate tone and volume of voice. Furthermore, the study of Liane & Ginsburg, (2007) confirms the findings of the current study by advocating that style of teaching in higher educational setting requires a Good Command of the Subject, Punctuality, Kindness & Sympathy and Attractive Personality.

5.1. Characteristics of Effective Teaching in Higher Education

Punctual: One of the main perceived elements of effective teaching according to university students is the characteristic of punctuality. Previous research studies also has the view that punctuality is considered to be one of the main characteristics of effective teachers (Calaguas, 2012). The participants also responded about other behavioral characteristics of effective teaching including sense of belonging, providing equal opportunity to each student to participate in class activities. But the major theme which was developed on the basis of source data is punctuality. It reflects the perspective of the respondents about the importance of punctuality in becoming the effective teacher at university level.

Kindness and Sympathy: The other characteristics of effective teaching as explored by the current study are the kindness and sympathy. During the process of interview conduction and transcription, it was analyzed that the majority of the respondents have the view that a teacher at the university level should be kind and should be able to understand the intellectual abilities of the students. Beside this, the students also hold the perception about fairness in grade marking and un-biasedness in class. But the major theme which is developed on the basis of source data was kindness and sympathy which reflects the perspective of the respondents about the importance of kindness and sympathy as the major characteristic of an effective teacher at university level.

Attractive Personality: One of the other perceived characteristics of effective teaching according to university students is the attractive personality. Previous studies also have the view that personality is considered as one of the main characteristics of effective teacher. Moreover, students also responded that besides attractive personality, the way of presenting the lecture also matters a lot such as most of the students respond about the gesture and non-verbal communication of the effective teacher at the university level.

Communication Skill: The next notable characteristic of effective teaching as explored in the current study is the communication skill. The qualitative source data reported communication skills as the most important characteristics of an effective teacher at university level. Word frequency query also reported about the tone and volume of effective teacher at university level but the major theme which is developed on the basis of source data is communication skill.

5.2. Methods of Effective Teaching in Higher Education

The next unstructured question was asked to the participants that what are the methods of effective teaching. On the basis of qualitative source data the following major themes emerged.

Practical Example: Qualitative model of the study shows the characteristics of practical examples. Students have the perception that explaining the content of the text with advancing practical example is an effective way to gain active attention of the student during lecture. Most of the respondents also have the views that practical examples are effective to learn the content related to concerned area of study. By asking further advantages of practical example from the respondents, it is also conceptualized that it is the effective method to involve the students during the lecture in class. Practical examples also assist the students to simplify the conceptual clarification about the complex concept of the subject.

Simple language: The next important theme of the effective method of teaching is to explore the importance of simple language. The source data analysis documented that the most effective method of effective teaching is the use of simple and precise language. The rigorous process of interview and transcription of source data shows that during the lecture an effective teacher should use simple and precise language according to the intellectual and academic ability of the students. Students have also the perception that they feel ease in understanding the concept when language used by the teacher is simple and precise in nature. The use of simple and precise language also positively affects the students' learning.

Multimedia: Qualitative model of the study display the factor of using multimedia during the lecture. Students have the perception that by using presentation on multimedia is more effective to understand the topic easily. Majority of the students have the view that by practice of multimedia it is much easier to understand the topic.

Tone and Volume: Qualitative model of the study depicts the characteristics of tone and volume of speech during the lecture. Students have imparted that explaining the content of the text is linked with appropriate tone and volume of the speech which in turn grabs the close attention of the students during class lecture. Furthermore, the students have also the perceptions that gesture and presentation skills also matter a lot during the advancement of lecture at university level.

6. Conclusions

To achieve the objective of the study effectively two main unstructured research questions were asked from the participants. First, what should be the major effective teaching characteristics of a teacher at university level? Secondly, what the effective teaching methods of a teacher should be at university level? Regarding the first research question the major theme or characteristics of effective teaching are punctuality, kindness & sympathy, attractive personality and communication skills. The factors of effective method of teaching were explored as the characteristics of practical example, tone and volume, multimedia and simple language. Findings of the study are consistent with two previous studies (Liane & Ginsburg, 2007; Zhang, 2005).

7. Recommendation and Future direction

The practical implication of the study is context based and cannot be generalized at larger extent. However, theoretically the study contributed to the styles and characteristics literature in general and to the literature on the relationships between styles of effective teaching and learning particularly. In the light of study findings, it is recommended that faculty members at the higher level education in Pakistan should improve their self-efficacy to enhance the student's learning. University management needs to pay attention to the professional competency of the teaching faculty. In order to build the teachers' competence in-service trainings should be provided. To increase the productivity of in-service training of teachers, financial rewards and promotions may be given. This study employed Auto Coding by using NVIVO 10 software, thus the future studies can best use Axial Coding for in-depth understanding of this subjective phenomena. Last but not least, future studies can conduct a

comparative study of effective teacher characteristics among private sector and public sector universities.

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