

First year Student Perceptions of Teacher and Teaching Effectiveness a new Approach in the Evaluation of Educational Process

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Abstract: *While most research has been conducted on the questions related to effectiveness education in post-secondary institutions, projects that investigate the student perceptions of both teacher and teaching effectiveness are rare if not inexistent. This study proposes to determine organizing principles in students' perception of educational effectiveness. In this qualitative study, the data was gathered by using open-ended surveys. The questionnaire was conducted to 25 first year students at a university in Fes, Morocco in the 2012-2013 academic terms. The results revealed that students' perception of "effective teacher" and "effective teaching" yield two set of items significantly different. So, the two concepts were not interchangeable. The conclusions were that implications for more attention must give to wording the items questionnaire in the way that allows us avoiding confusion and bias in student educational evaluations.*

Keywords: *first year students, qualitative study, effective teacher, effective teaching*

I. Introduction

In all universities through the world, the quality of undergraduate teaching has become the focus of deep discuss in the last several years, both inside and outside of the sector (Chen & Hoshower, 2003; Slate et al., 2011). Providing teaching of quality to meet different needs of students with increasingly diverse backgrounds, expectations and levels of preparedness (Northedge 2003; Perry 1994), it's become preoccupation of most institutions in higher education, that any attempt to improve student achievement is predictable by improving teaching quality (Sanders and Horn, 1998 ; Nye et al. 2004). So, succeed these challenges; several universities at all levels are acknowledging the need for better practice in evaluating teaching. Although the reasons for evaluating teaching are numerous (Casey,1997) , improving teaching quality remain the main purpose (Kahn, 1993; Seldin, 1997; Remedios & Lieberman, 2008). Despite number of measures has been taken for teaching quality improvement in higher education; however evaluation by students, generally known as students' evaluation of teaching "SET" is by far the primarily and the most widely used approach by higher education institutions for evaluating and improving the teaching accomplishments of their faculties (Palchik & al, 1988; Seldin, 1997). SET is an instrument designed to assess the quality of teaching as experienced by the learner (Ulas, 2011) .according to McKeachie, (1997) is "the single most valid source of data on teaching effectiveness". This practice have began early into North American universities in the mid-1920s, (Apollonia & Abrami, 1997; Mason et al ,2002; Algozzine et al ,2004). Initiated by psychologist E.T. Guthrie (Murray 2005; Addison and Stowell 2012), the "SET" are acknowledging the "golden age of research" in the1970s (Centra, 1993 cited by Algozzine, 2004)

Nowadays, SET are considered yet the most if not the only influential measure of teaching effectiveness (Marsh, 1987; Chen & Hoshower, 2003; Emery, Kramer and Tian, 2003; Remedios and Lieberman, 2008), widely used formatively by faculty to improve their teaching quality (Braskamp, 2000). Thus, students particularly the current generation, appreciate being given a voice and the opportunity to express themselves, that they seem themselves are "confident of their ability to match the effort required to meet the expectations others place upon them and are motivated to do so as long as their own expectations of beneficial outcomes are met" (p.36) (DeBard 2004). So, better placed, as "the only direct, daily observers of a professor's classroom teaching performance" (Seldin, 1997), they can play an active role in the improvement of teaching quality and their learning as well (Perry 1994, Wilson and Ryan,2012, Calaguas, 2013). according to McKeachie (1983) "students are in class almost every day and they know what's going on, and they have some sense of whether they are learning" (p. 38) SooHoo, S. (1993) would agree with McKeachie asserted: "Student perceptions are valuable to our practice because they are authentic sources; they personally experience our classrooms first hand. . . As teachers, we need to find ways to continually seek out these silent voices because they can teach us so much about learning and learners". (p. 389). So, this renewing emphasis on teaching quality in higher education setting necessitates valid means of measuring this quality (Delaney et al. 2010). Thus, many of the current tools of evaluation "do not meet the overarching educational objective" (p.38)

(Emery et al 2003), there are differences in what specific instruments are intended to measure. According to Robertson (2004) "The university SET questionnaire may not always be measuring what it is supposed to be measuring » (p.677). There has been little systematic study of the problem of creating evaluation systems that truly respond to the needs of those who evaluate teaching performance (Theall & Franklin 2000). Furthermore, little attention has given to the structural nature of the evaluation (Cohen 2005). Kahn (1993) explains «institutions rededicate themselves to enhancing teaching effectiveness, they are recognizing that efforts to improve teaching and learning must go hand in hand with efforts to improve the evaluation of teaching»(p.122). Also in agreement with an incremental view of teaching evaluation in higher education is Mckeachie (1969) who cautions us as follows:

"Both the evaluation form and the procedures will, in many instances, require adjustments to make them suitable for employment in different institutions of higher education, and within particular institutions" (p.439). According to Hobson and Talbot (2001), well developed student evaluations with adequate reliability and validity data may provide some of the best measures of teaching effectiveness.

Most of the previous studies, which looked at how students evaluate their teaching, confirmed the contribution of teacher (Marsh 1981; Marsh and Bailey 1993; Husbands 1997; Lin et al 2010); or some teacher personal trait (Sherman and Blackburn 1975; Murray & Lawrence 1980; Feldman 1986; Jones 1989) in the evaluation of teaching quality. Muray et al. (1990) indicate:

"given that teaching is in part a social or interpersonal process, it seems reasonable to expect that teacher personality traits might correlate significantly with rated teaching effectiveness" (p.250)

Marsh (1981) conducted a comprehensive study of student ratings using evaluations from 1364 classes. He suggested that the effect of the teacher on student ratings of teaching effectiveness is much larger than is the effect of the course being taught. Marsh and Bailey (1993) in their meta-analysis of student's evaluations revealed that the effectiveness of teaching is mainly a function of the instructor who teaches a course rather than the course being taught. More, Lin et al. (2010) in their study exploring the relationship between teacher and teaching they find that: "Teacher quality and teaching effectiveness are positively related, meaning the prediction power of teaching effectiveness, with teacher quality as the predictor, is significant » (p.167).

Regarding the influence of teacher personal trait on student evaluation of teaching, Murray (1975) reported by Murray et al. (1990) find that student ratings of new, previously unrated college instructors could be accurately predicted from peer ratings of personality traits obtained at least 5 months prior to student assessment of teaching. Feldman (1986) indicates that a student rating of teaching correlates moderately to high with some aspects of instructor' personalities. Sherman and Blackburn (1975) argue that students prefer an entertaining performer rather than an effective educator; thus, teachers' personality traits outweigh the importance of efforts devoted to teaching practices, further students often equate expressiveness with good teaching, as vocal skills and expressive movement (Murray & Lawrence, 1980), and as charisma and enthusiasm Abrami *et al.* (1982) that enhance ratings of the faculty regardless of how well they know their subject matter, these phenomenon is widely known as the Dr. Fox effect (Naftulin et al., 1973; Ware & Williams, 1975). The Dr. Fox effect has been interpreted to mean that enthusiastic lecturers can "seduce" students into giving favorable evaluations, even though the lectures may be devoid of meaningful content (Marsh and Roche 1997).

Furthermore Jones (1989) found that teacher's personality have an influence on student ratings of teaching quality, even when students have been awarded to the irrelevance of personality characteristics in evaluating teaching. Murray et al. (1990) in their study exploring peer ratings of 29 personality traits in relation to student ratings of teaching effectiveness, find that for any given type of course or for all types combined, student instructional ratings were strongly related to peer ratings of instructor personality traits. Phillips' study (1998) reported by Ali and Sell (1998) find that students in their perceptions about the student evaluation of teaching, they acknowledged that the personality of teacher is more present in their assessment despite that they claimed that this was irrelevant to the question of the effectiveness of the pedagogy. For Goldstein and Benassi (2006) students tend to evaluate perceived teaching quality in terms of the characteristics of teachers including their enthusiasm, presentation and clarity. All these studies cited above show that the evaluation of teaching is strongly influenced by teacher personality, thus, it can be a source of confusion and ambiguity and bias, that, although personality attributes are likely important, they may be overemphasized in students' recall of effective teaching (Kraus and Sears 2008). According to Ross, Amabile and Steinmetz (1977), it's due to Gestalt processes and the "fundamental attribution error" in social psychology. So, using a common tool to evaluate educational issues, it may not be considered a best practice. The evaluation items related to teacher effectiveness must be given separately from those related to teaching effectiveness in the SET.

Additionally, the two most widely used instruments in educational evaluation, Teacher Behaviors Checklist (TBC) Buskist et al.,(2002) and Students' Evaluation of Educational Quality (SEEQ) Marsh, H. W. (1982), composed each by a set of item so different by nature and meaning. The former (TBC) measure 28 trait of personality of effective teacher: *Accessible, Approachable, Authoritative, Confident, Creative and Interesting, effective communicator, Encourages and Cares for Students, Enthusiastic about Teaching and*

about Topic, Establishes Daily and Academic Term Goals, Flexible, good listener, Happy, Humble, Knowledgeable About Subject Matter, prepared, Presents Current Information, professional, Promotes Class Discussion, Promotes Critical Thinking, Provides Constructive Feedback, Punctuality/Manages Class Time, Rapport, Realistic Expectations of Students/Fair Testing and Grading, Respectful, Sensitive and Persistent, Strives to Be a Better Teacher, Technologically Competent, Understanding. Whereas the second (SEEQ) measures nine factors of teaching effectiveness: *learning/value, enthusiasm, organization, group interaction, individual rapport, breadth of coverage, exams, assignments, and workload/ difficulty*. By bearing in mind the components of these two instruments of measure, it may be hypothesized that educational evaluation will be conceptualized by considering both teacher personality traits and elements of effective teaching. This assertion can be supported by Akerlind's findings (2004), thus, in his research undertaken from a phenomenographic perspective of academics' ways of experiencing being a university teacher, in contrast to the focus taken in previous studies on academics' experiences of teaching per se, the results indicate that a focus on academics' experience of teaching separated from their larger experience of being a teacher may encourage over simplification of the phenomenon of university teaching.

We hypothesises that the notion of appraising or evaluating teaching in higher education setting must necessarily relate to views what constitutes both effective teaching and effective teacher. However, research involving perception of educational quality has failed to separate the two concepts. This study uses a qualitative method, an open-ended questions asking students about both teacher (person) and teaching (act) directly in attempt to uncover what Gengler *et al.* (1999, p. 175) refer to as the "reasons behind the reasons", and understanding how students perceive teacher and teaching effectiveness and to identify the conceptual structure that students use in their perception, this uncovering of a structure is helpful in wording the items and designing the questionnaire and consequently, avoiding as possible any confusion in the perception of the two concepts, that can constitute a source of bias in students evaluations of their effectiveness education.

II. Objectives

The purposes of this study were to delineate separately the characteristics of effective teachers and the characteristics of effective teaching. The two research questions were: (a) What do select first year students perceive as being characteristics of effective university teachers? (b) What do select first year students perceive as being characteristics of effective teaching? The results were evaluated as whole.

III. Methodology

3.1. Design

A qualitative survey design was used in this study. Survey research has been characterized as "the best method available to the social researcher who is interested in collecting original data for describing a population too large to observe directly... Surveys are also excellent vehicles for measuring attitudes and orientations in a large population." (p.270) (Babbie 2008). This approach proved successful as respondents offered rich descriptions and detailed narratives about their experiences as students "Students were to be free to identify the characteristics and how they are demonstrated without having their belief system influenced by researchers' views... Since the origins of perceptions are found in the belief systems of the students, the rich narratives provided by the students could identify, with greater certainty, the beliefs of the participants". (p.4) (Delaney et al.2010) . The survey allow students to express themselves spontaneously, fully, and in their own language rather than through the predetermined choices of the researchers Hong (1984), to identify the characteristics that they believe are important by hand-wrote. According to Cohen et al 2000 an "open-ended question can catch the authenticity, richness, depth of response, honesty and candor which ... are the hallmarks of qualitative data" (p.255) (Cohen et al., 2000).

3.2. Sample

Participants in this study were 25 first year students were choose randomly, to obtain a representative sample (Onwuegbuzie and Leech 2007). The average age was 19.52 years (SD = 1.12), with the youngest student being 18 years old and the oldest person being 21 years old. They all enrolled for the L1 (licence first year). They have the same Secondary School degree. According to Guest et al. (2006) "If the goal is to describe a shared perception, belief, or behavior among a relatively homogeneous group, then a sample of twelve will likely be sufficient... The more similar participants in a sample are in their experiences with respect to the research domain, the sooner we would expect to reach saturation"(p.76) In general, sample sizes in qualitative research should not be too large that it is difficult to extract thick, rich data (Onwuegbuzie and Leech 2007).

3.3. Instrumentation

The researchers employed the use of a survey comprising demographic questions and four open-ended questions. A general explanation of purpose was given orally for the university students. Additionally, the

instructions were typed at the top of each sheets of paper that each participant received and assured the respondents of the confidentiality of the data and the answers they provide. Twenty five students were asked at the end of the first semester four questions in the same questionnaire:

1. In your point of view what are the characteristics of effective teacher?
2. If are you a teacher, what qualities in your point of view, you think that your students appreciate in you?
3. How you qualify effective teaching?
4. What in your point of view are the practices that permitted effective teaching?
5. The questions 2 and 4 were added just for inciting and encouraging students to more expressiveness about the effective teacher and effective teaching characteristics respectively.

3.4. Procedure

My thesis director, she has been in charge of administering the survey instrument with opened-ended questions to students at the end of practical class session for in Ferber 2012. She explained the purpose of the study to students.

3.5. Data Analysis

The descriptors extracted from the students' responses were sorted into conceptual items based on Walls et al.'s verb-referent methodology (2002) presented in the table. A conceptual item consisted of a verb followed by that verb's referent. Examples of these verb-referent statements are: Is punctual; Respects students, and so on. After careful analysis of the descriptive corpus, emergent categories of verb-referent statements of effective teaching and effective teacher were captured. Two item pools were generated, one represent what constitutes effective teacher and another represent of what constitutes effective teaching from the overall perspectives of the respondents.

IV. Resultats

At first, the most participants' responses given in the questions 1 and 3 were rewrite in the questions 2 and 4 respectively As shown in table 1, the 25 participants' responses yield a total of 22 and 21 verb referent statements corresponding to effective teacher' characteristics and effective teaching' characteristics respectively. The first observation that can be made from these data shows a clear distinction in the students' responses, it's finds a specifics about the students' perceptions of their educational effectiveness yielding distinct items. Thus, regarding verb-referent statements that constitute effective teacher were shorts, one, two or three words (i.e. is dedicated, respect students...), the most statements are traits of personality that what students hope in their instructor as person.

Table 1: Effective teacher and teaching verb referent categories extracted from survey

Characteristics of effective teacher <i>Verb referent statements</i>	Characteristics of effective teaching <i>Verb referent statements</i>
...is good communicator	...is transmitting knowledge in a way that facilitate learning
...explain well	...is respecting students and treating them with sympathy
...is punctual	...is a course content allow acquisition of new and valued knowledge
...is understanding	...is an environment conducive to learning
...is honest	...is encouraging students to participate in discussions and to share ideas
...is dedicated	...is course well prepared and clearly explained
...is persevering	...is mastering of matter teaching
...is flexible	...is involving students in the course
...is serious	...is showing good impression toward students
...is smiling	...is providing (by teacher) support and helps to students
...possesses a sense of humor	...is inciting a students to be explorers of knowledge
...is modest	...is adapting a course content to the research progress in the subject
...is patient	...is integrating support to facilitate learning
...respect students	...is initiating students to research
...is well presented	...is having a genuine interest and concern in students needs
...have strong personality	...is reading attention (teachers) to the need of student (academic and personal)
...is self-confident	...is treating students equitably and without discrimination by a teacher
...is approachable	...is availability (teacher) to any student consultation
...is accessible	...is availability (teacher) for any re-explanation in case of need
...is model for students	...is giving an evaluation in relation to what is taught
...is well prepared	...is giving an Evaluation/correction of exams with responsibility

...is expert in subject	
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Whereas verb-referent statements concerning effective teaching were expressed with long phrases (i.e....is treating students with respect and sympathy by teachers,...is mastering matter teaching), that constitute what students expect from their instructor and what he must afford to them.

V. Discussion and Conclusion

The aims of the study were to clarify the way how the first year students conceptualised both “effective teacher” and “effective teaching” in their perception, project that has not been addressed in the wide body of literature on student perception of educational effectiveness. Most of earlier studies (Bail and Mina 1981; Stevens et al 1981; Feldens and Duncan 1986; Raymond 2008; Khandelwal 2009; Allen et al 2009) used teacher and teaching interchangeably although they are not identical (Miron & Segal 1978). By asking the respondents only what the characteristics of effective teaching limits the range of effective teacher characteristics that can be included and vice versa, and thus impose inherent limitations on evaluation of teaching or teacher. For example, as evaluation of effective teaching forms can assess mainly those characteristics that are related to the fact “doing”, on the contrary, asking such a question: what are the characteristics of an effective teacher?, conduct us above mainly to the personal characteristics of the teacher that are reflect the “being” more than the “doing”. Thus we must admit at the outset that evaluation of teaching process is incomplete and lacking in scope, and must always be complemented by each other the two sources of data on teaching and teacher. Again, we see that if we rely solely on evaluation of teaching effectiveness or teacher effectiveness as a measure of instruction effectiveness, we will inevitably make some mistakes. For example Students are in a good position to judge humans characteristics of the teacher such approachability, empathy, respect... these qualities were the core of the teaching practice, have a strong impact on student learning. But the expert or pair not.

So, as we can notice, the results in this study show that the respondents expressed differently their perceptions. Thus, the importance seen here of “effective teacher” and “effective teaching” as a distinct concepts in the students’ perception is significant. The ways in which students answer to open-ended questions shows that their responses have been influenced by the content of questions (teacher or teaching) facing them in the survey, each question generated a mental representation of what each implies and then, bring immediately to mind an answer (Robertson, 2004). The difference of these mental representations reflects a difference in the students’ perceptions, and then a difference in the categories that constitutes characteristics of effective teacher and those of effective teaching. So, using a common tool for evaluation of educational issues without precise what exactly (teacher or teaching or course...) may not be the best practice, we can’t know exactly what items are related directly to the act (teaching) and those who related directly to the person who teach (teacher). This ambiguity was too revealed by Marsh (2007) who stated “An important, unresolved controversy is whether the SET instruments measure effective teaching or merely behaviors or teaching styles” (p.322). So, the selection of evaluation questions is an essential factor in ensuring that evaluations are valid measures. As Marsh and Roche (1997) argue:

The validity and usefulness of SET information depend on the content and the coverage of the items. Poorly worded or inappropriate items will not provide useful information, whereas scores averaged across an ill-defined assortment of items offer no basis for knowing what is being measured (p. 1187). Additionally, Cohen’ study (2005), using Factor analysis and a Smallest Space Analysis (SSA) to discover organizing principles in students’ evaluations, finds that the course and the teacher’s effectiveness may be considered separate categories of evaluation, because its comprised distinct elements independent of their relationship with the student, he concludes “Distinguishing between these categories could be helpful in identifying or correcting bias in student evaluations” (p.123). According to Kraus and Sears (2008), Students who are asked to describe excellent teachers “may naturally focus on the personality of such teachers and overlook the context and techniques used in the classroom”, however “asking students about teaching techniques directly may yield practical suggestions for techniques that help build the sense of community that students value” (p.33). We can suggest that in their perception of “effective teacher”, students are concerned with questions such as “How will teacher behave with me?”, so in their perception of “effective teaching”, they are concerned with questions such as “How will teacher behave with all students?”, so, it means that in the first year level, the teacher must strive to meet different personal needs of different students.

The findings of this study could be considered as an expanding to these funding above. We suggest that there needs to be a specific set of items for evaluating the effectiveness of instructor and another set of items for evaluating effective teaching. The respondents’ opinions will reflect the all. Questionnaire design may take care to separate items related to teacher from those related to teaching, this distinction may help in avoiding confusion and biases in the educational evaluation particularly those due to the lenient grading Greenwald and Gillmore (1997) and Dr Fox effect (seducer teacher). Gravestock and Gregor-Greenleaf (2008) write that “Design of the instrument also plays an important role in ensuring validity” (p.30).

In many studies concerning teaching quality evaluation the researchers prefer to “list define” teaching processes by outlining extensive characteristics, behaviors or skills that may be used to determine if teaching is occurring such as SEEQ and BTC questionnaires. However, these lists of items or categories often show a preoccupation with the teacher personality trait or factor of teaching. Considering each list solely would not reveal a total picture of the teaching process. So, in order to improve teaching quality in higher education, student evaluations must be obtained by distinguishing between the elements that constitute characteristics of effective teacher and those of effective teaching. Proceeding in this way permit us to minimize confusion and bias that can be occurring in the SET, as revealed by Tagomori and Bishop’ (1995) analysis of the content of 200 instruments used in student evaluation of college teaching. Perhaps Marsh and Roche (1997) summarize the challenge facing the use of students evaluation of teaching quality by saying that “Confusion about the validity and the effectiveness of SETs will continue as long as the various distinct components of students’ ratings are treated as a single “puree” rather than as the “apples and oranges”” (p.1195). Ongoing the finding of this study is a clear indication that appraising educational effectiveness in higher education setting must necessarily separate the effective teacher’s characteristics to those of effective teaching in a way to avoid as possible any confusion that can bias students’ perception of teaching process.

VI. Implication and Recommendations

The focus taken in this study on the first-year students’ perception of both effective teacher characteristics and effective teaching characteristics should highlighted new aspects of university teaching that can support the “news students” in their transition, adjustment, persistence and success in the university settings. These findings are significant, as previous studies of perceptions of teaching process by students have not highlighted the existing differences between the two concepts: effective teacher and effective teaching. So, the study reinforces that, in the educational process, there are complementarities between the characteristics of teacher as person and the characteristics of teaching as act. This study holds exciting potential for developing more complex understandings of teaching process in the post secondary institutions, which in turn has implications for the improvement of university-level teaching. Hopefully, these findings should be considered one of the other possibilities of building a useful knowledge base for teaching in the tertiary level, so that serve as tool to the development of university academics as teachers and novice teachers may benefit, and the study will be the beginning of a more extensive research agenda in the area of educational effectiveness at the higher education.

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