PH.D. STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES OF TEACHING AND LEARNING AT A UNIVERSITY IN MUMBAI

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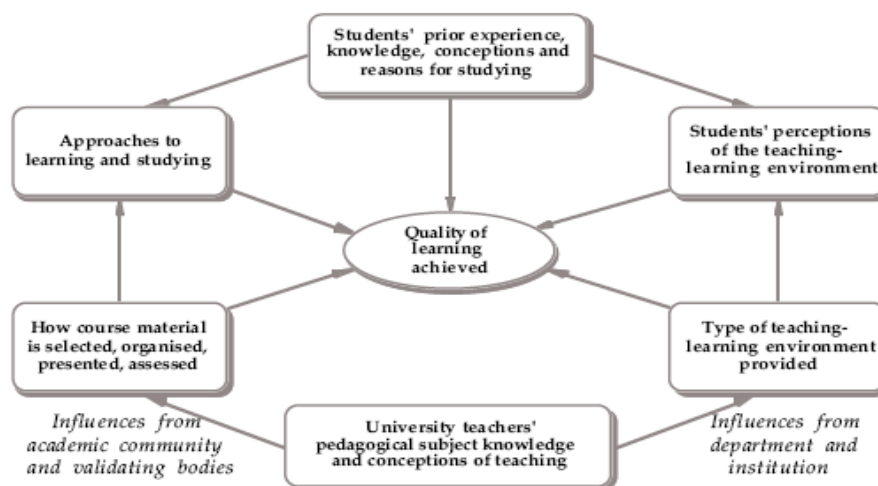
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Since the mid-1970s, there has been a large number of studies deriving from the work of Marton and his co-workers (Marton & Säljö, 1976, 1997). There is now a set of concepts used to suggest a framework of influences on the quality of learning, some of which stem from the student's own experience, while others describe aspects of the teaching-learning environment being provided by staff. There would not be general agreement about which concepts to include, several probably would attract broad support. Students' prior educational experiences are reflected in their *conceptions of learning* (Säljö, 1979; Marton & Säljö, 1997) or *epistemological beliefs* (Perry, 1970; Hofer & Pintrich, 1997), and also in their reasons for studying and *learning orientations* (Beaty, Gibbs & Morgan, 1997). Early work on the influences of the contexts within which learning takes place showed that a deep approach was related to what students perceive as 'good teaching' and 'freedom in learning' (choice in what and how to learn), while a heavy work load was linked to a surface approach. It has subsequently been established that multiple-choice questions and short answer tests tend to induce surface approaches (Scouller, 1998), and it has been suggested that some more open forms of assessment (certain types of essay, authentic problems and project reports) encourage deep approaches, although systematic investigation of these effects is still lacking. **But it is students' perceptions of the teaching and assessment procedures, rather than the methods themselves, that affect student learning most directly** (Ramsden, 1997; Entwistle, 1998 a, b). The effects of different forms of teaching and assessment led researchers to investigate differences in the ways in which university teachers describe their teaching and carry it out. From similar research came a set of concepts paralleling the work on student learning.

Teachers apparently differ in both their *conceptions of teaching* and their *approaches to teaching,* based on a series of overlapping categories that distinguish a *teacher-focus* linked to *information transmission* from a *student–focus* with an emphasis on *conceptual*

change (Prosser & Trigwell, 1999).University teachers' conceptions of teaching have their origins in their prior experience and beliefs, and these conceptions affect their current decisions about how to design courses and how to teach and assess within them. The approaches to teaching adopted, and in particular the ways in which students perceive them, affect the approaches to studying that students adopt. And those approaches then influence the quality of learning achieved (Prosser & Trigwell, 1999).

This body of research offers a clear and relatively straightforward conceptual framework for thinking about ways of improving teaching and learning in higher education. But how complete is it and how firm is its evidential basis? Many of the interview studies are based on small samples in specific subject areas, while inventory studies assume that students can accurately, and will honestly, describe how they study. In striving for simplicity and parsimony, the conceptual bases of the most popular inventories have left out some important aspects of studying (Entwistle & McCune, in press). Not only does more emphasis need to be put on concepts such as self-regulation (Schunk & Zimmerman, 1998) and emotion (Volet, 2001), but also on ideas coming from social psychology and sociology stressing learner identity (Mentowski, 2000), collaboration in learning, and 'communities of practice' (Wenger, 1998).

Figure 1: **Concepts related to the quality of learning at university**[1]

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[1] Approaches to Studying and Perceptions of University Teaching-Learning Environments:
Concepts, Measures and Preliminary Findings (2002), Universities of Edinburgh, Coventry and Durham,

Ph.D. Students' Learning And Teaching Experiences At Auniversity In Mumbai

One of the components added to doctoral studies in a University in Mumbai is the undertaking of the PH.D. course work. The course work comprises of a course in Research Methodology. The aim is to acquaint students pursuing their Ph.D. with the nuances of research methodology. This would help them in basic understanding of the methodology to be adopted by them in their own research work. As the Department ventured into offering this course we knew that the important ingredient for teaching at this course was to provide students with experiences of teaching that would facilitate and foster learning.

Essence of good teaching depends on the relationship between the teachers and the students. The teachers' role involves acting as a conduit between knowledge and understanding. The teacher enables the various facets of the subject to be seen in meaningful ways. This is important because each student comes to a class with different understanding of information, ideas, facts, beliefs and skills that serve as a frame of reference and the context

within which new information s being received. Teachers have to create conditions for learning with a focus on students' understanding. Coherent set of conditions have to be developed for understanding.

Rationale

Teaching effectively at this course for doctoral level students depends, above all, on teaching being seen not just from the perspective of the subject specialist but also from that of the student. In other words, the teachers in this course had to imagine what it is like not to understand, and then consider what steps are needed to help students to achieve their understanding. We had to realize that teaching for understanding will be effective only if constructive and timely feedback is provided. The teachers should also be aware that assessment has to be periodically done because it necessarily involves a demonstration of student's understanding. Therefore the course has incorporated teaching strategies such as seminars, presentations etc. where students had to work in groups co operatively and collaboratively. In other words, the responsibility of a course team in planning and organizing a course extended to the whole teaching learning environment, by ensuring that each element of it as far as possible supports the main aims of the course.

The necessity of this survey arose due to the need to know about Ph.D. students' experiences during the conducting of the Ph.D. course work. The aim was to know whether the students had a positive experience of the teaching, and understanding of the course content. This would provide a feed back to the organizers of the course as to the learning environment provided by them was in accordance with objectives of the course.

Operational Definition of Teaching Learning Experiences

The present study has defined teaching learning experiences in terms of Ph.D. Students' perception of the following dimensions of their experience;

- Congruence and Coherence Dimension

- Teaching for Understanding Dimension

- Staff Enthusiasm and Support Dimension

- Constructive Feedback Dimension

- Support from Other Students Dimension

- Interest and Enjoyment Dimension

➢ *ongruence and Coherence Dimension*: is the extent to which the learning is goal directed, purposeful and content is logically linked and presented.

➢ *Teaching for Understanding Dimension*: is the extent to which the teaching encouraged the learner to rethink their present understanding of the subject, enabled them to think about evidences underpinning different viewpoints and relate to the wider world what they have learnt.

➢ *Staff Enthusiasm and Support Dimension*: is the extent to which the faculty tried to share their enthusiasm about the subject and exhibited patience in explaining things that seemed difficult. It also reflects the extent to which the students' opinions were valued in the course.

➢ *Constructive Feedback Dimension*: is the extent to which the clear and constructive feedback is given to the student about his/her work, learning and studying.

➤ *Support from Other Students Dimension*: is the extent to which students supported each other and tried to give help whenever needed in order to help one another to improve their understanding.

➤ *Interest and Enjoyment Dimension*: is the extent to which the students found the course content interesting and enjoyable

Design of the Study

The study used the descriptive method of the survey type, as the research seeks to find out the perceptions of Ph.D Students of their teaching learning experiences.

Sample of the Study

The data for this study were collected from students who had to complete the course work in research methodology as part of their doctoral studies. The students had completed their Masters i.e. M.Ed. or M.A. in Education and may or may not have passed the National/State Eligibility Test. All the students had studied research methodology as a course/paper during their masters, but may or may not have had prior experience of conducting research.

Tool of the Study:

The *Experiences of Teaching and Learning Questionnaire* (ETLQ) has five sections. The first contains a short form of the *Approaches to Learning and Studying Inventory* in which the students are asked to describe how they actually had been studying within the target course unit (in contrast with the first questionnaire which asked about their more general approaches to studying). The **second section** covers the students' perceptions of the teaching and learning they had experienced on the course unit – to be described shortly. The **third** section asks about the demands that students felt the course unit made in terms of knowledge requirements and learning processes, while the **fourth** section paralleled those aspects in relation to what they felt they had actually gained from the unit. The final section was again a single item asking students how well they had felt they had done in the course unit they had just been taking. The reliability and validity of the tool was ascertained. The details for reliability and validity measures for each sub scale and the total scale is as follows:

Objectives of the Study:

To study Ph.D. students' perceptions of their teaching learning experiences in the following dimensions:

1. Congruence and coherence dimension

2. Teaching for understanding dimension

3. Staff enthusiasm and support dimension

4. Constructive feedback dimension

5. Support of other students dimension

6. Interest and enjoyment dimension

Technique of Analysis

Percent Mean: Scores in the present study were converted to percent mean, so that the magnitude of the variables can be depicted and comparisons of scores on different variables become easier. *Percent mean for scores on rating scale was calculated as follows:*

The lowest score is subtracted from the mean as well as from the highest possible score on the variable. Percent mean is expected to indicate mean score on the scale of 0 to 100.

Percent mean scores are interpreted using the following table

Table: 1

Interpretation of percent means scores

Range	Interpretation
0-20	Negligible
21-40	Low
41-60	Moderate
61-80	Substantial
81-90	Very high

Table: 2

Descriptive Statistics for Teaching Learning Experience

Factors	Mean	Median	Mode	SD	Skew	Kurt
Congruence and Coherence	13.14	13	15	1.59	-0.57	-0.08
Teaching for Understanding	12.94	13	13	1.39	-0.38	-1.21
Student Enthusiasm and Support	13.68	15	15	1.60	-0.72	-1.17
Constructive Feedback	9.14	9	10	1.05	-1.04	0.65
Support of Students	9.6	10	10	0.77	-1.56	0.64
Interest and Enjoyment	9.28	10	10	1.72	-1.37	1.18
Total Score	67.77	69	71	5.67	-0.70	-0.39

Table 3:

Percent Mean Values for Teaching Learning Experience

Dimensions	Mean	Mean %	Interpretation
Congruence and Coherence	13.14	84.5	**Very High**

Teaching for Understanding	12.94	82.83	**Very High**
Student Enthusiasm and Support	13.68	89	**Very High**
Constructive Feedback	9.14	88.75	**Very High**
Support of Students	9.6	95	**Very High**
Interest and Enjoyment	9.28	91	**Very High**
Total Score	67.77	**87**	**Very High**

Table 4: Percent Mean Values for Students Perceptions of Learning from the course

Dimension	Mean	% Mean	Interpretation
What You Learnt from this Course	34.11	81.59	**Very High**
Demands Made by the Course	38.42	71.05	**High**

Interpretation and Discussion

From the above it is clear that the students' perception of Congruence and Coherence, Teaching for Understanding, Student Enthusiasm and Support, Constructive Feedback, Support of Students, Interest and Enjoyment and total teaching learning experiences is Very High. This could be attributed to the fact that right from the conceptualization of the course, the deliberate goal directed focus of the staff in ensuring the congruence and coherence of subject matter to be delivered in order to make learning purposeful. Reflection and action

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based on reflection is a necessary ingredient to make teaching learning experiences joyful and goal directed.

As observed by Porter and Brophy (1988, 78), it is also important to take into consideration the "deeper dimensions" of teaching – in other words, the principles informing good teaching practice for effective learning in higher education In their informative synthesis of seminal research on good teaching, Porter and Brophy (1988) point out that the importance of the deeper dimensions of higher education teaching began to be more frequently acknowledged in the 1980s. One influential example of this genre is the Seven Good Practice Principles for undergraduate education , proposed by Chickering and Gamson (1987). For these researchers, good practice in undergraduate education:

1. Encourages student-faculty contact.

2. Encourages cooperation among students.

3. Encourages active learning.

4. Gives prompt feedback.

5. Emphasizes time on task.

6. Communicates high expectations.

7. Respects diverse talents and ways of learning.

Therefore in dealing with adult students and teaching at the University it is necessary to hold on to and critically practice active learning in all our courses.

Conclusion

However, insights derived from our current study and other recent work is already leading us to re conceptualize our own view of the influences of teaching-learning environments on student learning. Specifically, we are becoming more and more aware of the difficulty, through any single conceptual framework, of adequately representing the complexity and the social dynamics of the inter-relationships that exist in everyday teaching and learning. Resorting to already existing research generated knowledge informs us that the Contributing reasons why students leave higher education are: lack of preparation for higher

education; a poor match between the institution and course selected; previous academic experiences; inability to make friends and interact socially; personal circumstances; and financial issues. Adding to the "academic culture shock" are the complexities of learning and living, expectations placed on students, new teaching and learning, learner autonomy, self-direction and interacting with teaching staff (Thomas 2009). The research course under study was so framed and transacted based on a constructionist perspective, "... the view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context" (Crotty 1998, p42). In addition, there is a socio-cultural dimension to these constructions. People are born into cultures that provide them with meaning for their world. These meanings, informed by others around them, shape their thinking and behaviour throughout their lives (Crotty 1998). The adoption of a social-constructionist approach in the teaching and learning at University will enable us to have meaningful teaching and learning experiences. We have also to be more concerned about the match between research findings and everyday reality in the descriptions in the research literature of teaching-learning environment.

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