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## **The Millennial (Generation Y) Students' Perception of Teaching Effectiveness: A Case of a Tier-One U.S. Midwestern University**

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to identify the selected Rosenshine and Furst (1971) factors that influence Millennial (Generation Y) student learning, and the influence of those factors and other background variables on students' evaluations of teaching. The result indicates that the ten factors adapted from Rosenshine and Furst (1971) studies were perceived by Generation Y students to positively influence their learning. The result also indicates that great teaching skills favor good evaluation. However, students' evaluations of teaching are a lot better when instructors combine great teaching skills with great personality, less workload, flexibility and friendliness.

**Key Words:** Millennial, Generation Y, Teaching Effectiveness, Evaluation, Student Perception

### **Introduction**

Teaching effectiveness and student evaluation of teaching are both significant issues in higher education that continue to receive increased attention. Rosenshine and Furst (1971) studied 50 teaching behaviors that influence student achievement. Ten of the top 50 teaching behaviors associated with student achievement include clarity, variability, enthusiasm, task-oriented and/or business-like behavior, student opportunity to learn, positive reinforcement, avoiding criticism, use of structuring comments, effective questioning, and humor. The result of this study indicated that these teaching behaviors are effective for student learning, and their use for teaching effectiveness has been strongly supported by research (Garton, Miller, and Torres, 1992). Could these variables also be attributed to student evaluations of teaching?

### **Literature Review**

Past studies indicate that student ratings of teaching effectiveness are positively related to objective measures of student learning, and, thus, can be seen as valid indicators of instructional quality (Cohen, 1981; Gursoy and Umbreit, 2004; Marsh, 1984; Murray, 1980). Another study of great importance to teaching behaviors is Feldman (1989) meta-analysis of 46 studies regarding the relationship between student learning and evaluation of teaching. Feldman identified 31 teaching dimensions for classifying specific ratings and their relations with student achievement. Some of the potencies of both the Rosenshine and Furst (1971) and Feldman (1989) analyses is that they utilized quantitative techniques to condense results from the many studies they analyzed. A comparison of their studies show some overlaps in some of the teaching effectiveness dimensions, especially with regard to enthusiasm, clarity, organization, and the encouragement of questions. Components of their studies are readily embedded in student evaluation of teaching (SET) instruments.

Other background variables purported to influence student evaluations of teaching are concerned with the *characteristics of the course* itself (Marsh and Dunkin, 1992; Braskamp and Ory, 1994; Anderson and Siegfried, 1997), the *characteristics of the instructor* (Anderson and Siegfried, 1997; Wachtel, 1998), the *characteristics of students* and the biases introduced into student evaluations of teaching (Koermer and Petelle, 1991; Tatro, 1995; Anderson and Siegfried, 1997; Chen and Hoshower, 1998). Many colleges and universities employ student evaluations without assessing the relevance of their measurement to Generation Y students, whose behaviors and interest greatly differ from previous generations. Previous studies have investigated different background variables or dimensions that affect students' learning, achievement, and evaluations of teaching effectiveness. However, no study has specifically studied the perceptions of Generation Y students regarding some of the suggested variables that influence teaching effectiveness and student evaluations of teaching.

The characteristics of Generation Y students differ in many ways as compared to the previous generations. According to Deloitte Consulting LLP (2005) study, Generation Y (also known as the millennial) are characterized as techno-savvy, well connected...24/7, self-confident, optimistic, hopeful, independent, comfortable self-reliant, determined, goal oriented, success driven, lifestyle centered, diverse, inclusive, global-minded, civic-minded, community-minded, pulling together, service oriented, thrive on flexibility, and entrepreneurial in life. However, some of their characteristics come with some short comings such as the fact that they are impatient, and they are the most “hovered over” generation ever in U.S. with unprecedented parental supervision and advocacy.

The impact of technology advancement in the life of the millennial cannot be overemphasized. According to the Deloitte Consulting LLP (2005) study, most of them never experience life without the influence of a computer. In fact, the younger they are, the more they think they know, depending on the influence of computer in their life. They believe that the world is a click away; hence, they perceive all information and competition as a click away. The mindset of Generation Y students is certainly different from the mindset of the previous generations. The above characteristics of Generation Y are similar to Howe and Strauss (2003) findings, detailed in their book, “Millennial Go To College.” These findings indicate that generation Y students are different in many ways from the previous generations.

The impact of technology advancement in their life could affect their perception of education. The fact that they are the most hovered over generation in U.S. could also affect the way they feel about their teachers and school in general. What the previous generations might consider important for success might be taken for granted by hovered over Generation Y. The factors that the previous generations might considered important for learning might be perceived differently by Generation Y. Similarly, the factors and/or behaviors that could influence previous generations’ evaluation of teaching might be perceived differently by Generation Y. Hence, the purpose of this study is to examine the factors that influence student learning from the perception of Generation Y students and the influence of those factors on student evaluations of teaching effectiveness.

The specific objectives of the study were to:

1. Identify selected Rosenshine and Furst (1971) factors that influence student learning among Generation Y students.
2. Examine the influences of teaching effectiveness skills and other background variables on students’ evaluations of teaching.
3. Identify the variables that mostly influence students’ evaluations of teaching.
4. Test whether there is a difference between those instructors who practice all the teaching effectiveness skills without additional background variables and those instructors with great teaching skills coupled with other splendid background variables.

## **Methodology**

### *Population and Sample*

The target population for this empirical study was students at a tier-one Midwestern University in the United State. The sample selection for this study was a purposive sample of 115 students of the institution.

### *Instrumentation*

The student perception of teaching effectiveness and excellent evaluation instrument was developed by the researchers based upon the review of several literatures (Anderson and Siegfried, 1997; Braskamp and Ory, 1994; Feldman, 1989; Garton, Miller, and Torres, 1992; Marsh and Dunkin, 1992; Rosenshine and Furst, 1971; Wachtel, 1998). Seventy-five items were identified and grouped in the factors of clarity, variability, enthusiasm, task-oriented and/or business-like behavior, student opportunity to learn, positive reinforcement, avoiding criticism, use of structuring comments, effective questioning, humor, and other background variables. The first ten factors were solely adapted from the work of Rosenshine and Furst (1971). Hence, the validity of the instrument wasn’t an issue

because it has been sturdily supported by research (Garton, Miller, and Torres, 1992). Internal consistency for the instrument and each of the factors was established. The common measure of internal consistency is the Cronbach alpha. A Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.7 and above indicates a high degree of internal consistency among the data collected (Harris and Ogbonna, 2001; Hsu et al., 2003). The internal consistency for the overall student perception of teaching effectiveness and excellent evaluation instrument is reliable (Cronbach's alpha = 0.96). Similarly, the internal consistency for each of the ten factors is reliable (Cronbach's alpha ranged from 0.72 to 0.91).

*Data Collection and Analysis*

Data collection was based on Web-based survey method. Snap was used to design and administer the survey. Data were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 15.0 for Windows, a product of SPSS, Inc. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviations, and frequencies) were generated on each factor to determine the ranking of factors the students perceived to influence student learning, and their evaluations of teaching effectiveness. T-test was used to evaluate the differences in means between other background variables purported to influence student evaluations of teaching.

**Results**

The first objective of this study sought to identify the selected Rosenshine and Furst (1971) factors that influence student learning among Generation Y students. All the ten factors adapted from Rosenshine and Furst (1971) study, were perceived by Generation Y students to positively influence their learning. The factors' means ranged from 3.1 to 4.45. Table 1 presents the result of the factors' means and their standard deviations. The five most highly rated factors were "clarity" ( $M = 4.45$ ), "avoiding criticism" ( $M = 4.22$ ), "provide student opportunity to learn" ( $M = 4.08$ ), "positive reinforcement" ( $M = 3.96$ ), and "task-oriented and/or business-like behavior" ( $M = 3.70$ ).

**Table 1. Factors that Influence Student Learning**

Rank	Factors	M	SD
1	Clarity	4.45	.60
2	Avoiding Criticism	4.22	.78
3	Provide student opportunity to learn	4.08	.71
4	Positive reinforcement	3.96	.86
5	Task-oriented and/or business-like behavior	3.70	.74
6	Enthusiasm	3.58	.89
7	Structuring Comments	3.29	.90
8	Variability	3.27	.84
9	Effective questioning	3.13	.89
10	Humor	3.08	.94

Note. Items rated on 5 point scale (1 = Bad, Never, or Not Important, 2 = Fair, Seldom, or Rarely Important, 3 = Good, Sometimes, or Fairly Important, 4 = Very Good, Often, or Important, 5 = Excellent, Always, or Very Important).

The second objective sought to examine the influences of teaching effectiveness skills and other background variables on students' evaluations of teaching. Table 2 presents the result of the means and standard deviations of teaching effectiveness skills and other background variables that influence students' evaluations of teaching.

**Table 2. Ranking of Background Variables that Influence Students' Evaluations of Teaching**

Rank	Variables	M	SD
1	I give instructors with great teaching skills plus great personality excellent evaluations	4.56	0.79
2	The instructor's knowledge about the course influences my evaluations	4.39	0.96
3	I give instructors with great teaching skills but less workload excellent evaluations	3.66	0.90
4	I give instructors with great teaching skills plus more workload excellent evaluations	3.59	1.05
5	I give friendly instructors excellent evaluations	3.57	0.96
6	I give instructors who are more flexible with their students, excellent evaluations	3.56	1.02
7	I give instructors with great teaching skills but poor personality excellent evaluations	3.21	0.95
8	I give instructors with more course content excellent evaluations	3.20	0.92
9	I give instructors with harder assignments/examinations excellent evaluations	2.90	0.92
10	The degree of course difficulty influences my evaluations	2.85	1.18
11	The experience level of an instructor influences my evaluations	2.82	1.29
12	I give passive and nurturing instructors excellent evaluations	2.70	1.09
13	The degree of course value to my future career influences my evaluations	2.69	1.20
14	I give authoritative and aggressive instructors excellent evaluations	2.59	0.94
15	I give instructors with simpler assignments/examinations excellent evaluations	2.54	1.12
16	I give instructors with less workload excellent evaluations	2.52	1.06
17	I give instructors with easy workload excellent evaluations	2.44	1.06
18	I give instructors with poor teaching skills but with great personality excellent evaluations	2.27	1.02
19	I give instructors with less course content excellent evaluations	2.21	0.90
20	I give instructors who are less flexible with their students, excellent evaluations	2.01	0.98
21	I give less friendly instructors excellent evaluations	1.98	0.94
22	I give instructors with poor teaching skills but with less workload excellent evaluations	1.92	0.96
23	The rank of an instructor influences my evaluations	1.90	1.13
24	The age of an instructor influences my evaluations	1.72	0.98
25	I give instructors with poor teaching skills plus poor personality excellent evaluations	1.46	0.86

Note. Items rated on 5 point scale (1 = Never, 2 = Seldom, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Often, 5 = Always).

The seven most highly rated variables were “great teaching skills plus great personality” ( $M = 4.56$ ), “instructor's knowledge about the course” ( $M = 4.39$ ), “great teaching skills with less workload” ( $M = 3.66$ ), “great teaching skills with more workload” ( $M = 3.59$ ), and “friendly instructors” ( $M = 3.57$ ), “instructors who are more flexible with their students” ( $M = 3.56$ ), and “instructors with great teaching skills but poor personality” ( $M = 3.21$ ).

The five lowest rated variables were “I give instructors with poor teaching skills plus poor personality excellent evaluations” ( $M = 1.46$ ), “The age of an instructor influences my evaluations” ( $M = 1.72$ ), “The rank of an instructor influences my evaluations” ( $M = 1.90$ ), “I give instructors with poor teaching skills but with less workload excellent evaluations” ( $M = 1.92$ ), and “I give less friendly instructors excellent evaluations” ( $M = 1.98$ ).

The third objective sought to identify the variables that mostly influence students' evaluations of teaching. Table 3 presents the result of the frequencies and percentages of the variables that mostly influence students' evaluations of teaching. The five most highly rated variables were “instructor's teaching skills” (89.47%), “course content” (42.10%), “enthusiasm” (36.84%), “instructor's personality” (33.68%), and “instructor's flexibility” (24.21%).

**Table 3. Variables that Mostly Influence Evaluation**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Instructor's teaching skills	85	89.47
Course content	40	42.10
Enthusiasm	35	36.84
Instructor's personality	32	33.68
Instructor's flexibility	23	24.21
Course value to my future career	13	13.68
Instructor's experience level	13	13.68
How much I like the instructor	9	9.47
Instructor's friendliness	9	9.47
Instructor's nurturing skills	8	8.40
Instructor's Humor	6	6.31
Ease of assignment	5	5.26
Instructor's rank (i.e., Director of program, Chair of program, Assistant or Full professor etc.)	0	0.00
Instructor's Age	0	0.00

Note. Variables are not supposed to add up to 100%. These variables are the computation of individual student's selected three variables that mostly influence their evaluations of teaching.

The fourth objective was to test whether there is a difference between those instructors who practice all the teaching effectiveness skills without additional background variables and those instructors with great teaching skills coupled with other splendid background variables. The splendid background variables include flexibility, friendliness, great personality, and less workload. The result of Paired Sample T-test for each of those variables indicate that an instructor who has a great personality, flexible, friendly, and less workload will be rated significantly higher than instructors with comparable teaching skills but without great personality, flexibility, and friendliness ( $P < 0.001$ ).

### Discussion

These data provide preliminary information that the ten factors adapted from Rosenshine and Furst (1971) study, were perceived by Generation Y students to positively influence their learning. The factors' means ranged from 3.1 to 4.45, meaning that those factors are considered from good to very good for influencing Generation Y students' learning. In this study the factor that mostly influences students' learning is clarity. This finding supports previous research conducted by Rosenshine and Furst (1971) in which clarity of the instructor was identified as the teaching effectiveness behavior that had the strongest relationship with student achievements. This result reaffirms the importance of good planning and organization as a teacher. The more time you use in ensuring that your syllabus, class objectives and notes are clear the better for students' learning.

The result of the study also reinforced the fact that Generation Y students don't like to be criticized. They expect to be respected by their instructors. Unlike the Rosenshine and Furst (1971) study, the factor "avoiding criticism" was the second highly rated factor for influencing Generation Y students' learning, compared to seventh in Rosenshine and Furst (1971) study. Similarly, unlike Rosenshine and Furst (1971) study that identified variability as the second strongest teaching effectiveness behavior that had the strongest relationship with student achievements, this study identified variability as the eight factor for influencing Generation Y students' learning.

The result of the study also indicates that Generation Y students desire to be provided the opportunity to learn. Unlike Rosenshine and Furst (1971) study, the factor "Provide student opportunity to learn" was the third highly rated factor for influencing Generation Y students' learning, compared to fifth in Rosenshine and Furst (1971) study. Similarly, unlike Rosenshine and Furst (1971) study that identified enthusiasm as the third strongest teaching effectiveness behavior that had the strongest relationship with student achievements, this study identified enthusiasm as the sixth factor for influencing Generation Y students' learning.

The result of this study also indicates that great teaching skills favor good evaluation. However, students' evaluations of teaching are a lot better when instructors combine great teaching skills with great personality, less workload, flexibility and friendliness (see Table 2). The respondents in this study rated instructors with great teaching skills plus great personality better than instructors with great teaching skills but poor personality. Similarly they rated instructors with great teaching skills but less workload better than instructors with great teaching skills but more workload. The result of this session also indicates that the respondents also rated flexible and friendly instructors better than less friendly and less flexible instructors. These findings seem to fit well with some of the characteristics of Generation Y students. They are known to thrive on flexibility and work well with friends.

This study also indicates that teaching skills is the most important factor that influences students' evaluation of teaching, followed by course content, and enthusiasm respectively. Table 2 shows that on one hand, students favor instructors with great teaching skills but less workload than instructors with great teaching skills but more workload. On the other hand, students favor instructors with more course content than instructors with less course content. This finding suggests that reasonable and accomplishable course content does not necessary influence students' evaluations of teaching negatively. However, students' perception of the workload to be too much could influence students' evaluations of teaching more negatively than the course content.

### **Conclusions/Recommendations/Implications**

This study has applicable practical implications. First, it confirms that Rosenshine and Furst (1971) selected teaching effectiveness factors are applicable for Generation Y students. Instructors should be aware of these factors and the varying impact of each factor on student learning, and combine these factors in ways that will maximize student learning and student achievement. The three most highly rated teaching behaviors that influence students' learning were "clarity" ( $M = 4.45$ ), "avoiding criticism" ( $M = 4.22$ ), and "provide student opportunity to learn" ( $M = 4.08$ ). To ensure clarity, instructors should often give a preliminary outline of a lecture at the start of class, often outline major points during the presentation, speak clear English, repeat and simplify difficult materials. Instructors could ensure not putting their students down by allowing students to freely express and explain their own views in class, students questions or comments should be respected, instructors should employ and respects constructive criticism in class, and suggests specific ways students can improve. Instructors could ensure that they are providing students opportunity to learn by using easy to follow outline to present class objectives, by being actively helpful when students have problems, by providing helpful explanations and comments, motivating students to come to all lectures, and providing examples that match the class objectives.

Second, the study also indicates that instructors could maximize their evaluation score by combining great teaching skills with great personality, flexibility, and by being friendly with their students. Most importantly, the study shows that an instructor that practices all the teaching effectiveness skills without other background variables will be rated lower than instructors with great teaching skills coupled with other splendid background variables. Hence, instructors are encouraged to be reasonably and rationally flexible and friendly with their students, in order to provide the students a positive learning experience while positively influencing the students' evaluations.

Third, the finding of the third objective of this study suggests that reasonable and accomplishable course content does not necessary influence students' evaluations of teaching negatively. However, students' perception of the workload to be too much could influence students' evaluations of teaching more negatively than the course content. Hence, instructors that take student evaluation seriously should consider an appropriate balance of course content and student workload when designing syllabus.

### **Limitations**

The result presented in this study was based on the preliminary data collection of 115 respondents of the selected sample. More data are being sought to substantiate the findings in the preliminary data collection.

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