

STUDENT EVALUATION OF DIFFERENT TEACHING METHODS AND THE EFFECTIVENESS THEREOF

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Abstract

A significant amount of time and effort has to go into teaching students. It is no art when lecturers simply read from a text book. The objective of this study was to determine the teaching methods that students at the Hotel School, Central University of Technology, Free State, consider as most effective to support learning. All first-year students (N=73) enrolled for the National Diploma: Hospitality Management were targeted to participate in the survey. A mixed-method study design was followed, and a questionnaire consisting of closed- and open-ended questions was developed for data collection. Closed-ended questions were rated on a five-point Likert scale, while answers to open-ended questions were analysed to determine trends. Results showed that lecturers used a variety of teaching methods. The lecture teaching method was rated best by 49% of students followed by the group discussion method which was rated as second best (19%). Case studies and brainstorming were the least-preferred methods (4% and 0% respectively). Lecturers should ensure that maximum information is transferred through the teaching methods that most appeal to students. The focus should be on enabling students to practically apply the lessons taught in everyday life.

Keywords: evaluation, teaching effectiveness, facilitator, learning process

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the most asked questions when it comes to teaching, is how much learning actually takes place when the lecturer does all the talking? Moreover, what do students perceive as the most effective teaching method? According to research, students are the most effective source in reporting whether a learning experience was productive or not (Theall & Franklin, 2001:109).

The main objective and responsibility of any lecturer must be to facilitate student learning (Bulger, Mohr & Walls, 2002:1). Teaching is no art when it is done by simply reading from a text book. One of the best methods lecturers can use to improve the success of the learning process of students is to develop and use appropriate activities and assessments, and to provide students with possibilities to demonstrate success (Guskey, 2003:6). A significant amount of time and effort has to go into teaching students (Mattox, Curran, Heinz, Huff, Merica & Harris, 2009:15).

A study that by De Caprariis, Barman and Magee(2011: 1-11) shows that effective teaching methods are directly connected to active learning methods. The best way to evaluate whether a teaching method is effective, is through peer review, self-evaluation, student achievement and student ratings of the specific teaching method that is used by the lecturer (Sajjad, [s.a.]:13). It has been shown that when students evaluate a lecturer highly, the students perform better in the course being taught (Fah & Osman, 2011:45). Using different reflective teaching strategies is extremely important in teaching and learning (Rogers, 2001:37-57). Reflective teaching strategies can be described as a careful thought or consideration. It is a process of intellectual criticism combining research, critical thinking about actions and the knowledge of the content. Reflective teaching is an approach to learning, problem solving and teaching using reflection as a main tool (Minott, 2010:3).

It is highly recommended that facilitators at any educational institution have to find effective and efficient ways to educate students to provide feedback that addresses aspects of their experiences (Sajjad, [s.a.]:13). The success and progress of student learning is highly influenced by the interest of the lecturer and the resources that are used for teaching the students (Braun, 2005:3). The learning process of students may be significantly influenced by the characteristics of the lecturer (Magno & Sembrano, 2008:73-90). It is important for the lecturer to focus on new approaches and be able to recognise when a method is effective (Goe & Holdheide, 2011:5). Students should be enabled to enter the world of work and establish whether the information obtained from the lecture has any value attached to it (Wurdinger & Rudolph, 2009:3). It is the responsibility of the lecturer who wants to improve learning to break down the various barriers of the content to allow for better insight for the students (Bodie, 2006:898).

Students in tertiary education are most likely to remember the content and make a deeper connection when the “WHY”-factor behind the teaching content is explained to them (Ballard & Hayatt, 2012:8-9). Providing different relevant activities to students allows them to engage in higher-order learning (Valentine, 2007).

One of the main reasons for student failure is that the lecturer fails to develop new teaching methods to help the students learn (Page, 2008). While lecturers may think that their methods are good enough to captivate students, students often do not regard all methods as relevant. One of these ineffective methods is student-led presentations (Lukowaik & Hunzicker, 2013:57).

2. OBJECTIVES TO THE STUDY

- To determine the different teaching methods that is used by the university lecturers.

- To investigate the opinions of the students regarding the different teaching method(s) used by the lecturers.
- To determine which specific teaching method the students most prefer and least prefer.
- To obtain reasons why the students allocated the given ratings to the teaching methods.
- To evaluate the results and make suggestions on how the Hospitality Management course could be improved.

3. METHODOLOGY

A mixed-method study design (qualitative and quantitative research) was followed. The Hospitality Management programme at the Hotel School of the Central University of Technology, Free State, was selected for this study. All 73 undergraduate first-year students enrolled for the National Diploma Hospitality Management were included in the study, as they could provide a fresh insight into studying at a tertiary level, having just made the transition from secondary to tertiary level. The study was conducted during the month of July 2013. Permission to conduct the study at the Hotel School was obtained from the Head of Department of the Hotel School. The questionnaire that was used to collect the data was handed out after the students attended a theory class in the Hotel School. The questionnaire consisted of three sections and a total of 10 questions which the students were requested to complete. Section 1 of the questionnaire was aimed at collecting information about the demographic characteristics of the students.

Section 2 consisted of closed-ended questions where students could indicate the different teaching methods that they mostly prefer (lecture, group discussion, individual presentation, assignment, brainstorming, role play, case study) and to rate them on a Likert scale from 1-5, with 1 being the strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree, as used in the study by Sajjad ([s.a.]:13). This information was obtained in order to determine the effectiveness of each teaching method (as perceived by the students) used by the lecturers. Section 3, consisting of five open-ended questions, was added to the survey to gather more information on why the students ranked the teaching methods with the specific ranking, and to provide recommendations for improvement.

A pilot study was carried out by using six second-year students who are repeating some of their subjects. During the study, the authors ensured that any ethical considerations, such as causing physical harm, financial harm and social harm to the students, were eliminated. Students who participated in the study remained anonymous, and the confidentiality of the information gathered from each student was ensured.

All 73 questionnaires were completed at the same time by the students and on completion the students were instructed to hand in their own questionnaire to the instructors when they left the room.

After the questionnaires were collected from the students, the data was analysed and tabulated to determine the effect of each teaching method and the method students most and least preferred. The study results were collected, analysed and presented using percentages, charts and tables to map each teaching method's effectiveness. Formative validity was applied to the findings of the study which showed that the information collected helped improve the teaching and learning process at a tertiary level. The results are aimed to help facilitators construct the most effective teaching methods to use and thereby making the study valid. The degree to which the students agreed in the most effective teaching method(s) showed the Inter-rater reliability of the study.

4. STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

The descriptive data was analysed using Excel spreadsheet, and reported using percentages and frequencies. The answers to the closed-ended questions were collected by using a 5-point Likert scale. The answers to the closed- and open-ended questions were summarised and analysed to determine trends.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A total of 73 undergraduate first year students participated in the study. Of these, 68 were between the ages of 18 to 22 years; 3 students were between the ages of 23 to 27 years; and 2 students were between the ages of 28 to 32 years. Figure 1 illustrates that 44% (32 of the 73) students who participated in the study were males, and 56% were females (41 of the 73 students).

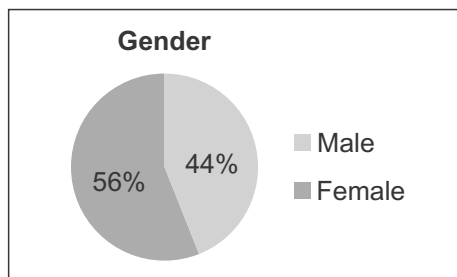


Figure 1: Percentage of males and females that participated in the study.

The findings showed that there were a total of eight different languages used by the students. These different languages included Afrikaans (20 students); English (6 students); Sesotho (30 students); and other languages such as Tsonga (1 student), Xhosa (5 students), Zulu (4 students), Chinese (2 students) and Tswana (5 students). Although the course is only taught in English, none of the students indicated learning in English rather than in their mother tongues created a barrier to learning.

The students were asked to select a specific teaching method used by the lecturers from the list in the questionnaire, and to indicate one of these methods they mostly prefer or most strongly agree with.

According to the results of the questionnaire (as shown in Table 1), 49% (n=36) of the first-year Hospitality Management students chose lecturing as the best teaching method. This was followed by group discussions, with a rating of 20% (n=14); and brainstorming being the least preferred by all the students, with a zero-percent rating (0%). Similar results were obtained in a previous study conducted at the Faculty of Arts, University of Karachi, where the results showed that the lecturing teaching method was rated as the best, with group discussions as the second best teaching method (Sajjad, [s.a.]:4).

Table 1: Teaching methods mostly preferred by the students.

Teaching methods	Frequency	Percentage
Lecture	36	49.32
Group Discussion	14	19.2
Individual Presentation	6	8.21
Assignment	6	8.21
Brainstorming	0	0
Role Play	8	10.96
Case Study	3	4.11
Total	N=73	100

Students were asked to rank these specific teaching methods on a five point Likert Scale with 1 as strongly disagree and 5 strongly agree. Through examining the results of the study, the different teaching methods were classified by the students on their opinion on the effectiveness of the different methods.

As shown in Table 2, the frequency of the ratings by the students on each teaching method was calculated (Table 2). Calculating the results has shown that “lecture” method received the most 5-point ratings with 29 out of 73 students rating the lecture method with a 4 on the scale and 21 students rating it with a 5. Although each teaching method received various ratings by the students, it is clear that there are teaching methods that are more effective than others.

Table 2: Ratings of the different teaching methods by the students on a 5-point Likert scale.

Teaching Methods	Rating					Number of Students
	1	2	3	4	5	Total
Lecture	4	3	16	29	21	73
Group Discussion	6	11	17	26	13	73
Individual Presentation	20	21	8	12	12	73
Assignments	4	6	23	24	16	73
Brainstorming	10	14	21	19	9	73
Role Play	14	16	13	15	15	73
Case Study	17	12	21	10	13	73

The students partaking in the study then had to answer the open-ended questions, which required them to explain why they ranked the lecture teaching method as the best.

Reasons for rating the lecture teaching method as the best were as follows:

- The lecturer can explain the information in detail.
- The lecturer has all the knowledge concerning the content that is taught.
- The lesson is not misleading and can be clearly understood.
- Feel comfortable being taught by someone who knows all the answers.
- The lecturer provides notes on the lesson.

Reasons why students, in their opinion, ranked individual presentation, brainstorming and case studies the lowest on the 5-point Likert scale (Table 2) were:

- Places too much pressure on the student (individual presentation).
- Do not like talking in front of many people (individual presentation).
- It confuses the students, and they often are uncertain of what exactly needs to be done (case study).
- It is often confusing (case study).
- Brainstorming is an action where people with little knowledge of the topic come up with a lot of ideas, but no point is made; less is learned.

The students were asked to state, in their opinion, whether the lecturer(s) use a variety or mix of the different teaching methods. Eighty-one percent of the students responded that the lecturer(s) use a variety or mix of teaching methods. The teaching methods that are being used by the lecturer(s) (as described by the students) are as follows:

- Lecture
- Role Play
- Group discussion
- Assignments
- Brainstorming

The results also showed that 18% (n=13) of the students explained that the lecturer(s) do not use a variety or mix of teaching methods, but only one with reason, such as the following:

- Lecture
- Slideshow presentations

At the end of the study, the students were required to make suggestions and recommendations on how, in their own opinion, they think the specific teaching method that they rated as least preferred (Table 2) could possibly be improved.

These recommendations can be used by the lecturer(s) to improve the teaching and learning process.

The suggestions that the students made were as follows:

- “Lecturers must have more interaction with the students”.
- “Different approaches must be used to explain the lesson”.
- “More slides must be provided which is more detailed”.
- “The lecturers must use other forms of teaching such as videos”.
- “The best way to learn is through making it fun”.
- “Lecturers must give the students time to do things on their own”.
- “The time frame should be appropriate to the lesson”.

The study was conducted at the Central University of Technology, Free State, Hotel School. It was limited to only one course that consisted only of first-year Hospitality Management students and only 73 students were available. The results will therefore not be applicable to other Hospitality Management students or other students at any other higher education institution in South Africa.

6. CONCLUSION

The main purpose of this study was to determine the opinions of the students on, and to determine the effectiveness of, the different teaching methods used by lecturers at tertiary level. The study also aimed to determine which teaching method(s) are least preferred by the undergraduate students, and how these teaching methods can possibly be improved. The results of the study took into account the age, gender and culture of the students. Based on the results of the study, undergraduate students in the Hospitality Management course preferred a lecturing as the best teaching method. The students rated the group-discussion method as the second best teaching method, and brainstorming as the least preferred teaching method.

The study showed that most of the students agreed that the lecturer(s) use a variety or mix of teaching methods, but the results also showed that not all teaching methods are effective. Although the results of the study showed that not all of the teaching methods that are used by the lecturer(s) are effective, there is room for improvement through the recommendations made by the students.

For future studies, the size of the sample can be increased by involving more students from different academic years; students from different faculties and ultimately students from different universities, in order to generate more reliable results. The data gathered from this study was limited to only one course at one university, and the study involved only undergraduate first-year students. The study was not able to generalise the results to any other faculty, academic year or another university, or the lecturers of these other courses and institutions.

The accuracy of the study depended mainly on the honesty and willingness of the students to provide accurate and true information regarding the survey and their understanding of the different questions that were asked. The data of the study also depended on the personal judgement of the students. Finally, the study was subject to a limited amount of time, resources and financial constraints.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

- Lecturers should frequently evaluate the students to recognise which teaching methods are working effectively and which teaching methods need to be improved.
- The lecturers must take the responsibility upon themselves to ensure that the students acquire the most information, by using the best teaching methods that appeal to the students, and by using the resources that are available.
- The lecturer should convey the lesson to the students, and should provide them with a practical example in order to enable them to apply the lesson to everyday life.
- It is of utmost importance that students are provided with the opportunity to apply the information learned in order to discover the significance thereof.
- The information that has to be learned must be spread out over a sufficient amount of time, because students tend to lose interest when a large amount of information is communicated to them all at once.
- To evaluate the most effective learning experience, the lecturer must use the best resource they have, which is the students who receive the information.
- The results of the study showed that lecturers must arouse the interest and capture the attention of the students by using every possible resource and technique available to them.

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